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Victorian 3-decker novel

T. H. Gale

AN AUSTRALIAN MILLIONAIRE.

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AN

AUSTRALIAN MILLIONAIRE.

BY

MRS. A. BLITZ.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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AN AUSTRALIAN MILLIONAIRE

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

THE BRIDE AND THE BETROTHED.

'With this ring I thee wed, with this body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow.' Thus spake the bridegroom.

The die was cast, the irrevocable vows were recorded, and the bride and bridegroom were in the vestry in the act of signing the requisite papers.

The bride sat at a table under the full glare of a window facing her—sat pen in hand, and in her sheeny pearly robe, mantled by the marriage veil of rare lace, now thrown back from, and framing, a milk-white, oval face, with a double scarlet line, curved and voluptuous, marking the mouth, with a luxuriant crown of a coil of hair—fair

and rich as raw silk—of the faintest tint of amber, in which a twinkling comb of sapphires and diamonds caught and secured the lacy fall flowing from the bridal wreath. Her nostrils, pink and clearly cut, were slightly dilated; her full, wide, sweeping lids were now drooped as she held the pen within her firm white, ungloved hand to dash her maiden name off for the last time with an exceptional boldness and decision. That being done, the lids were swiftly raised to disclose eyes clear as the topaz, and of a neutral blue, yet taking a pale green tint, under the strong morning light flashed from the window.

In the whole aspect exultation spoke as she put the pen from her with the manner of a triumphant soldier clinking his victorious sword back to its sheath.

The bridegroom, however, evinced some signs of agitation as his pen gave forth a loose, scrawling, spluttering signature, and the name of JEREMIAH GOLDWIN stood revealed.

He was dressed in broadcloth and the finest of lawn, with diamond studs, breast-pin, and solitaires. His left hand was cased in white kid; his right was bared for the task of writing, and was coarse, knotty, and prolific in hair. He was tall, heavily framed, with a slight

stoop, and his head covered with a stiff crop of pale-brown hair dotted with patches of iron-gray till it was more piebald than anything else. His face was round and red, and so perseveringly shaven that a blue-purple tint ran through cheeks and chin, where the strong hairy tendency was determined to assert itself in tiny painful hirsute points. He was a man long past his prime, while his bride was something like thirty-five years his junior.

Their surroundings were peculiar.

A pair of elderly couples officiated as the respective parents of bride and bridegroom. There were a couple of bridesmaids, foils for the bride in their conspicuous want of personal attractions, and a best man who looked older, but was more than ten years younger, than the bridegroom—a seedy-looking personage, who might reasonably have impressed the spectators with the idea that he was an impromptu appendage hurriedly called upon with no time allowed for attention to toilette.

His contrast to the company rendered him attractive for once in his life.

He was a long, lean, mummy-skinned man, with ferret, sunken eyes under a low forehead, with sleek hair and a long brown beard which crept up to his cheekbones and over his lips—a

perfect tangle trespassing wherever it possibly could—the upper portion of his face peeping as it were out of the jungle. This was Washington Larry—no impromptu attendant, but the sworn friend of the bridegroom—an American by birth, an Australian by nature, and generally addressed as Wash. He was dressed entirely in rusty-black—funereal rather than festive, in the absence of anything bright—he only needed a crape band on his arm to heighten the impression of mourning, for even his hands hid away their veiny parchment-coloured lean ugliness in a most respectable pair of black cotton gloves. This completed the wedding group—quite a motley one—for which a couple of carriages stood in readiness without the church porch, with ribboned whips and decorated horses, where a crowd had collected and awaited to see the exit of the party as it had witnessed its entrance.

A number had scrambled and smuggled into the church during the ceremony, and one individual in particular had walked up as far as he dared to watch the better the beautiful bride, but neither to admire nor criticise. He was quite a young man—tall, slender, wiry, and of excellent physique. His form was erect; his face fair as a girl's, but deathly pale now; his

brows dark and straight, but so knitted under present passion that they met almost in one even line over keen hazel eyes which were fixed on the bride with no expression of good-will; while his mouth wore a mocking smile, partly hidden by a thick, soft, well-arched moustache drooping below his chin. He followed her as she left the altar, and watched her again as she sat under the blaze of light from the vestry window pen in hand; and as she wrote, his hand for a second became a fist with cord-like veins, but held stiffly at his side as if it grasped a dagger. The next moment it relaxed, and he strode moodily away from church and street. Nobody noticed him. Everybody was eulogistic about the bride, so bewitching, and had no eyes for aught else.

Far away from the church, however, somebody was thinking of him very seriously, very anxiously; a very unimportant somebody, and yet an important part of a whole, since she must be one of the supports of this history—and this was Priscilla Glade, or, as her mother called her, 'Cilla. She was no heroine, but a simple, credulous, confiding young person who might have been fooled over and over again in blissful ignorance. The world teems with such women.

She was not beautiful or bewitching, but was not without a certain prettiness, for she had limpid brown eyes, a clear skin of the brunette type, and cheeks faintly tinted with pink, a button of a mouth, rosy and fresh, and a graceful form of *petite* dimensions. At present her countenance does not represent light-hearted youth, for it is doleful—and more than doleful: it is woebegone, and declares a heavy spirit within. Priscilla Glade was in love, be it said; and, moreover, as she firmly believed, hopelessly in love.

Quite two years previously her mother—a gentle widow—desiring to make her small income go as far as possible, advertised, 'An apartment to let for one gentleman.'

The gentleman who ultimately came to terms with Mrs. Glade was young and handsome, a bank-clerk, and with fair references. His affability and respectability were unquestionable, and Mrs. Glade was delighted with him as a profitable and pleasurable investment. He became a permanent boarder, and in a very short time the friend of the house. Mrs. Glade and her daughter, having lived hitherto alone, were glad of his companionship.

Priscilla was a school-teacher, a patient, plodding school-teacher, conscious of mental

deficiencies, and anxious for intellectual advancement that she might take something in hand higher than an infant class, and so add materially to the domestic treasury, which was straitened. She tried to teach herself many useful things, but a memory not retentive often blocked her efforts. When the boarder — Theodore Lockstud — had been some few months beneath her mother's roof, and his intimacy was beginning to take to itself a somewhat fraternal colouring, he volunteered assistance to his landlady's pretty little daughter, whose aspirations towards higher culture were stronger than her grasp upon the books she attempted to study. Never was preceptor more warmly appreciated by pupil. He helped her over knotty questions, supplied her with books of reference, and more often than not imparted information without the aid of books. She believed him a miracle of learning, a living, breathing encyclopædia — handsomely bound, too—an oracle to be venerated.

Theodore Lockstud believed her to be a silly romantic girl, who amused and enlivened him during the hours when he had nothing better to do than to sit by her side and give her the benefit of his superior education and attainments. Nevertheless, it pleased him to

feed her with sweet or tender speeches occasionally, to see her eyes brighten, or the colour mount to her temples or die away entirely, according to his pleasure, to feel her hand tremble at the touch of his, to note the admiration, the veneration, that beautified her face when she looked up into his, to know the power that was his to influence her for sadness or gladness. His vanity was touched, but his heart unreached.

The lessons went on, and Priscilla's soul drank in intoxicating ecstasy far quicker than her mind absorbed his teaching of dull facts. So it came to pass that often of an evening, when their heads drew closely together over book or paper, Mrs. Glade would glance at them, and reconnoitre the position in all its bearings with a smile, and yet not without a tear. The one said, 'A pretty pair!' the other, 'She will leave you for him!'

But the months wore on, and pairing and departure seemed remote indeed, for by some freak of circumstances the venerated beloved master showed unmistakable signs of avoiding his disciple, neglecting his pupil. It was well known to Mrs. and Miss Glade that he had an aunt with whom he had once lived until he had quarrelled, but that latterly he had made his

peace with her, and was therefore a frequent visitor at her house. Priscilla associated the unhappy reversal of matters with the reconciliation to his aunt, having had from the gentleman himself such an analysis of this relative's character that it served to cast no creditable reflection on her, but imaged to the simple, confiding, credulous mind of the girl a selfish, grumbling, exacting, parsimonious creature of whom he stood in some fear.

The day of the wedding which opens this chapter was a general holiday (St. Patrick's) throughout the colony of Georgius, and Phillipia, its busy metropolis, was not backward in putting on its festive attire, or running to the seaside or picnic-grounds to do honour to the worthy—the immortal Apostle of Ireland. Priscilla, in the midst of it all, stood a miserable unit away from her daily duties, but inclined to no pleasure. Indeed, the first half of the day she applied herself to pen and paper, meaning hard work, but making no headway.

She made a desperate attempt to compete for a prize of five guineas, offered through the daily papers by a temperance society, for the best essay on 'The Evils of Intemperance'; but as her earnestness leaned more to the handling of the five guineas than to a desire to further

an excellent cause by convincing argument, and as her brain was already occupied with a problem mischievously drawn there by Cupid, and having nothing in common with Bacchus or anti-Bacchus, it may well be understood that her efforts promised to be futile.

She sat in her own room before a small table with paper spread in readiness to receive her thoughts, and with a pen in her hand; but instead of writing she found herself trying to draw on the margin of the sheet the profile of a young man with an arched flowing moustache, a Grecian nose, and an expressive dark eye. This also was a failure. Next she nibbled at her penholder, puckered her brows, and stared at the ceiling for inspiration on the temperance question with a resolution to fix her mind on the subject. Alas for her resolution! alas for her inspiration! Unless a strong hand beckons, a strong will attracts, grapples, and controls, Resolution defies; unless Genius woos, Inspiration is not to be won.

Priscilla, lacking the strong hand, the strong will, and the necessary genius, wasted more than an hour in scribbling and tearing up, and scribbling again, and bemoaning her incapacity the more because she missed Lockstud's assistance, and felt that with his help she might do a

great deal; but, wearied with disappointment and sore at heart through his neglect, the only thing she succeeded in doing well was crying. She cried bitterly with her head down between her arms on the table.

'Cilla,' said a voice at her elbow presently. It belonged to a mild-faced woman, with smooth gray bands of hair under a becoming cap, and eyes like Priscilla's, only more inclined to sink in their sockets, and less bright—'Cilla.'

'Yes, mother.' The girl started to her feet, and stammered forth an excuse in broken words. 'I never thought it so hard to write an essay. I don't know how to begin, and can't find ideas. I am a useless, stupid girl, and there isn't a book amongst the lot to help me. Oh!'

And here she sat down again and fell to crying.

Mrs. Glade, noting the badly-drawn profile on the paper's margin, gave a sad little smile, and said tenderly:

'Are you expected to illustrate the essay?'

'Cilla, making no reply to this, kept her head down, but put forth a hand, blindly groping for the sheet containing the faulty likeness, that she might cover it up.

'Child,' continued her mother, with gentleness still and a meaning emphasis, 'when you

are as old as I am you will understand how much deceit there is in the world, and not break your heart over it either.'

'Cilla, in reply to this, beat back her tears, and arose on the defensive, fully understanding the allusion. She protested against the broken heart.

'I don't say,' went on Mrs. Glade, unheeding her daughter's protestation, 'but what you have some reason on your side to be hurt and angry; and I myself am disappointed, for it was quite patent he gave you to understand that he was very fond of you, though perhaps he never said as much; yet actions can lie as well as words, and his were false, evidently. But for pity's sake don't let him think you are so stricken over it; he might come in any moment. You need not hide anything from me; a mother can be lynx-eyed sometimes, you know, and you need not deny that he troubles you more than the essay. You are crying over *him*. Come, 'Cilla, give up your tears; perhaps he isn't worth them, and remember whatever happens you have me; I must be true to you.'

'Oh, mother,' 'Cilla, making no further pretence, threw her arms round her mother and sobbed, 'but for you, I'd like to die!'

'Sh—sh!' Mrs. Glade prefaced her reply with a gentle hushing and a wave of her hand, as if to ward off a gnat; 'don't talk so; it is silly—worse than silly; it is wicked. You must face the world and its worries like a soldier faces the enemy—determined to conquer. I have had foes to face in my time—I have done my battles; and now I want to see you happy, that's all. You must be happy for my sake and your own, and let him see that you can be; if not, I'll tell him to suit himself with other quarters, and that would be quarrelling with our bread-and-butter. We can't afford to lose an excellent lodger who pays to the day and is always courteous; and to snap at him because he has neglected you, or has turned aside from attentions which we have misconstrued, would be absurd. Yet if you continue like this—mooning and moping—you will force me to give him notice.'

'I wish we had never seen him!' exclaimed 'Cilla. She had no wish to attempt to disguise her real feeling now, and emerged from her mother's arms the better for her sympathy and counsel. With an effort she next spoke calmly, and not without a secret sense of shame at her recent outburst. 'Depend upon it, his aunt has something to do with it.'

'I don't see why you should blame her. He has a will of his own, and is not likely to be influenced by her.'

'Yes, of course, but he has told me much about her. She is rich and stingy, looks the picture of health, and is always complaining and doctoring herself. But he is her only surviving relative, and it was his duty, he said, to make his peace with her, and listen to her sometimes.'

'Did he say all that?'

The tone of the words, and the expression in her mother's face, were alike harsh, and made 'Cilla say with a blush, as if to defend him:

'He told me in confidence.'

'He is too politic then, I fear,' said Mrs. Glade, not relaxing in severity.

'I don't understand; what do you mean?'

'Cilla could not follow her mother's train of thought just then; her unsophisticated nature did not, could not, admit any taint of deceit or disloyalty, and she believed others to be as she was herself, until convinced to the contrary. It never occurred to her that Theodore Lockstud erred in speaking as he did of his aunt, because he spoke the truth undoubtedly, and then but whispered it to her. She did not blame him

altogether for neglect of herself, because she considered the most blame rested on her. She had failed to please him, and his aunt's influence was the stronger, or, existing to a certain extent, was capable of counteracting her own, which she felt to be so very slight. But even while she writhed at his altered action towards her, and was wounded and stung to the quick, her love, far more powerful than her aggressiveness, created apologies for him, and removed his culpability willingly to anybody else's shoulders, even her own.

'I mean,' answered her mother, 'that he is wrong to speak of his aunt in that way, even if it is the truth. She is rich, and he naturally expects to be her heir; his duty to his aunt is seemingly prompted by what he considers duty to himself. To speak ill of her behind her back, and be at her beck and call and show a respect not felt, is a false idea of duty. Hearing this from you has hardened me more against him, and I believe I was nearly as fond of him as you are; but now I say put him out of your thoughts, for you and he would never be happy together.'

'You always spoke of him well,' said 'Cilla with a little inconsistent pettishness, and not ready to accept her mother's clear penetration

of the character of the man to whom she had given her whole soul. 'You wrong him. His aunt used to badger him, he told me, and want him to dance entirely to her piping, but he was too much of a man to submit to it. Yet he is ready to do his duty as far as he can; so he went to her house again, and only is anxious for peace for the sake of peace, and not for the miserable money she hoards; I'm sure of that.'

'Very well, my dear.' Mrs. Glade shrugged her shoulders. 'You are right, of course, and I am wrong. There, let it rest. You are right to stand up for him; he deserves it.'

Priscilla, not slow to detect the irony and tartness of this little speech, flushed as she replied:

'He deserves my gratitude, at any rate, for all his kindness and patience with me. You forget how patiently he has taught me much that I should never have known but for him. We have been foolish in thinking it anything else but disinterested kindness. If I am a silly girl, and no congenial companion for him, so that he seeks companionship elsewhere, why, it is my fault, not his.'

'Be as grateful as you please, but don't be a fool; don't let him see that it matters to you

whether he chooses to remain with you as before, or prefers being at his aunt's. That is my advice.'

Again there was an unusual tartness in the accents, a ring of impatience and wounded pride. Mrs. Glade turned and walked from the room quickly to hide bitter tears, as she had hidden her tender pity, beneath a sudden acerbity which she could not suppress. She left her daughter to continue, if she could, hammering at her brains for temperance ideas and words to clothe them.

That same afternoon the would-be essayist, spiritless and disheartened with vain effort, looked out from her bedroom window longingly at the sunshine, and decided to try a solitary stroll.

She honestly intended taking a little walk, but fate or caprice controlling her footsteps, it so transpired that she took a drive as well, and came home again physically and mentally warmed with sunshine.

She left her mother's house equipped in out-door gear, neatly gloved and booted; a broad-brimmed straw hat on her head; summer draperies floating over the hoop—then in vogue—not clinging with æsthetic grace about her little person; parasol in hand, and a hand-bag

on arm, in which she carried a note-book and pencil, as a ready vehicle for transmission of thoughts on temperance, should they occur to her.

At first she sauntered slowly away, and almost unconsciously found herself at the corner of a street not far from the Phillipia railway terminus, and about ten minutes' walk from her own home. Arriving there, her senses were suddenly quickened by a low rumbling in the distance which awakened her to surroundings. A tram-car was bustling along on its way to the city; not a steam-car with its clumsy, screeching, panting, belching locomotive, but one drawn by horses, plying principally for the convenience of passengers by train.

To-day it carried a load of pleasure-seekers; it looked inviting; a drive would cost but little. Priscilla peeped into her hand-bag to hunt for the coin required, and finding one, she met the car as it stopped at the corner, and added one more to its occupants until it entered the heart of the city.

Here she alighted, and began to wend her way up a crooked hilly street. Abstracted with thought having nothing in common with the essay which had so troubled her, she walked on, scarcely sensible of or grateful for the blue

and golden brightness above and around her. The street was quiet, with its shuttered shops and suspended business traffic ; saving for a few passengers or an occasional cab or carriage, it was empty, but had it been never so lively Priscilla would not have heeded, for her thoughts were travelling hopelessly, not unlike the footsteps of a man lost in the Bush, who, tramping a wretched circle, meets despair as he finds the delusive goal nothing but the starting-point : she only saw Theodore Lockstud, receded from him only to advance, and then feel as deluded and miserable as ever.

Over the ground and up the street she walked till she reached the city domain, entered, passed on, sped quicker as the earth sloped under her feet in easy descent, and before she was aware of her proximity stood outside the Botanical Gardens.

Coming suddenly upon the closed gates, she halted, and for a second forgot her trouble in her hesitation about passing on or going in. She decided to go in. The perfume that greeted her caused a slight exultation of spirit ; colour, light and inviting shade soothed her senses. A great Norfolk Island pine, like a mighty sentinel, towered to the skies and stretched its gigantic arms, waving and whis-

pering a melodious welcome. Many-hued flowers peeped upward from their beds, and varied foliage glistened under the sunshine.

The air was soft and deliciously scented, the trees rustled pleasantly, the birds twittered in their branches. With fragrance breathing all around, and Nature in her sweetest dress and smiling on every side, what wonder that the soul should be momentarily elevated above mundane things; and Priscilla loved flowers, the dear flowers, God-created, and so full of vivid life and blooming beauty, so fair and so fragile.

Lingeringly and lovingly she bent over a rose-bush, longing to pluck but one flower, yet dread of the Argus-eyed caretaker restraining her hand. She bent lower, and went on her knees to lay her cheek caressingly against the soft rich petals; she envied the rosy short life blooming to-day, to perish to-morrow with the mission fulfilled in giving brightness to the world, and never to know a check to the sweetness of existence. Stooping thus, she spied a rose close by, one fallen from the bush to die, with petals unhinged and drooping like broken wings. She picked it up tenderly, laid it on her lips as if for a farewell kiss, and then as a new idea dawned upon her

she slipped it carefully into her hand-bag, raised herself, and walked on to the lower garden with a quicker spring in her gait, and, for some not altogether inexplicable reason, with a quicker beating at her heart.

Within the lower garden the harbour expanded before her a comprehensive sweep of laughing, sparkling water—glittering blue, and bearing upon its bosom a man-o'-war at anchor bedecked with flags due to St. Patrick. The clarion notes of a brass band and the hollow beat of a drum, mellowed by distance, wafted across to her ears, told of festivity on board. Excursion steamers paddled and snorted to and fro, with a track of smoke belched from their funnels flying before the wind. Pleasure yachts with sails unfurled glided gracefully, a few with bright bunting flapping merrily in the breeze.

There were many people around, some in groups of twos and threes, others singly as she herself was, but the grounds were not overcrowded, and many isolated nooks and corners offered themselves here and there. She sought one in particular, a favoured spot, a pretty nest where a rustic chair meant for two was stationed, and all embowered within a tall thick clump of bamboo-trees.

Glad to rest, Priscilla sat down here, and,

after gazing around her in quiet enjoyment of the scene, she opened her bag and looked once more at her rose—the dying rose. She drew it out lovingly from its hiding-place, snapped to the bag with a sharp click, glanced hurriedly on each side as if fearing detection in a contemplated action which she wished to conceal—which her conscience told her was silly, and yet to which she felt impelled.

Who does not hanker after the unrevealed?

It was the old old story—the old charm. She began to pick the leaves one by one, and, as each fell to the ground, she murmured softly to herself: 'He loves me—he loves me not.' Her heart was actually stirred by faith in the eloquently dumb and oracular announcement expected of the last leaf.

The sunlight slanting through the clump which partly hid and wholly sheltered her touched her not. Was it ominous?

She did not hear a slight movement behind the bamboos following the clicking of her bag; yet the sharp snap had aroused a young man who had been stretched there in slumber.

He awoke dazed; his face was pale and drawn, rather as if he had gone through but recently some sharp physical pain which had left its tracks and shaken his nerves. As the

stupor of sleep wore off, he, peeping through the trees, saw a woman, whose back was turned to him, and whose dress was familiar.

Priscilla was still plucking at the petals ; the grass at her feet was strewed with them ; her countenance was full of earnestness, and a smile was stealing to her lips, when it was suddenly arrested by a well-known voice at her ear. But three words were whispered distinctly, and, turning swiftly, she saw Theodore Lockstud leaning towards her over the back of the seat.

'What wilful destruction!' he said.

'You here!' she cried, not without agitation, and starting to her feet.

'Undoubtedly'—this with an amused smile —'I am sorry to have alarmed you.'

'I thought you were away boating somewhere, because we have not seen you at the house since breakfast—I thought I was alone. How long have you been here?'

She was beginning to recover from her surprise and to set herself the task of showing an indifference to his doings which she could not feel, and she looked regretfully at the scattered rose-leaves, wondering if he had the least idea of her purpose with them—a feeling which forced her to search his face, which in its pallor and haggard lines appealed at once to her tenderness.

'Have you a headache?' she added.

'I will attend to both your questions in order,' he said, coming round to the front of the seat and sitting down, 'if you will reseat yourself and look less scared.'

Without a word she sat down.

'That is right. Well, I have been here a long time—asleep, I believe. These bamboos have sheltered me like a Jonah's gourd, for which I am duly thankful. I sought peace, and for a time found it. This leads to question No. 2: I sought this peaceful shade because I did have a headache, or something of the sort.'

'And why not make your presence known before?' She spoke half angrily, half tenderly. She was afraid he had been watching her with the rose; she pitied his evident suffering, and turned her eyes away to look towards the water, because they would have betrayed her.

'It is sheer impossibility to see through closed lids. I told you I was asleep; but some noise awoke me, and then I recognised your dress and came to the back of the seat to see you intent upon the wilful destruction of an innocent flower. It was not like you.'

She thought she could detect a ring of banter in his tone, which brought the small quantity of

mettle she possessed to the fore and sent the blood to her temples.

'It was no wilful destruction!' she exclaimed. 'The flower was dead or dying when I lifted it from the ground. I'm too fond of flowers to wilfully destroy them.'

'You accelerated its dissolution, then.'

'I was counting its leaves, that's all.'

She began to dig with her parasol into the grass, and persistently kept her head turned from him.

'Just for curiosity?'

He smiled—not pleasantly. In some moods his mouth curved downwards at its corners, giving the index of cynical temperament; it would have given a sinister expression to his features, but for being partly lost in the moustache.

'Just for that, if you like,' she answered, still digging and with head averted. Next, with a sudden impulse, she rose again, and said: 'I am going.'

'Going! Why, you have only just come, I suppose.'

'No matter; I want to be alone; I have a paper to prepare, and I want to take notes. Good-bye. I suppose we shall not see you this evening?'

She spoke carelessly enough, throwing one glance at him, and once more turning her face to the harbour. Another smile on his lips, but a more pleasant one ; amusement lurked at the corners.

'I ask you to stay,' he said, also rising and laying a detaining hand on her arm ; it was a firm, white hand—long, taper-fingered, filbert-nailed—and it sent a thrill through her frame. His manner and voice were, as of old, soft, winning, and wooing. 'I ask you to stay for a little while. Let me help you with the notes. It is a long time since you asked my assistance.'

Priscilla here was learning so well the lesson her mother had set her that, although her mouth twitched, she replied :

'I never asked your assistance. It was offered, but I can get on very well without it.'

Oh, Priscilla! This was in for a penny in for a pound truly. One fib over the flower, and now a second over the essay. Where would it end? She was getting conscience-stricken ; his hand still pressed her arm ; her mother's words rang in her ears : 'Don't let him see it matters to you whether he chooses to remain with you as before, or prefers being at his aunt's.'

'You are offended with me, surely,' he said.

'I am nothing of the kind; I want to go away.' She shook her arm gently from his hold.

'Not alone, 'Cilla, for I shall accompany you.'

'Check!' cried an inner voice which did not belong to Priscilla Glade, and which she could not hear.

'Oh, in that case,' began 'Cilla, all of a tremble, yet desperately struggling to assert herself, 'if you are determined to harass me with your company, I may as well remain here,' saying which she went back to the chair, and, opening her bag, brought forth her notebook. Sitting sideways to partly turn her back upon him, she began to write as an approach to the essay, 'Phillipia, March 17, 187—.'

Lockstud sat down again, and watched for a few seconds as she wrote. Presently tender reproach was whispered. 'Can you be Priscilla Glade, first to hurry a flower to its death, and next to withhold a single word of sympathy from one who is your friend — an especial friend? What have I done?'

Priscilla's hand shook as it held the pencil, which made nothing but dots and dashes; all her feeble dignity was beginning to melt.

'I really need your sympathy,' he went on,

'and your tenderness; you give me neither. Why?'

He knew why, but he missed her yielding to his words and wishes, and knew as well how to touch at her heart for the harmony he sought as any Greek of old ever mastered his lyre.

''Cilla,' he said, 'be yourself; look me in the face.' He put forth his hand a second time and took hers—the one nearest to him, holding the stump of a pencil; she did not resist. His next act was to take the pencil deliberately from between her fingers and slip it into his waistcoat pocket. 'Look me in the face,' he continued. 'I have been badly treated—have had trouble—and I came here to pitch myself headlong into the harbour there. Would you have been much distressed?'

'Oh!' she gasped at last, with her mother's counsel all forgotten and her eyes tear-filled. 'What has happened to make you say anything so dreadful? You could never mean anything so wicked.'

'I did indeed. I was mad; I was bitter.'

'Why? Aunt Jessie again?'

'No; she has nothing to do with it this time.' His hand, still holding hers, closed on it with a fierce pressure. 'It is something far from her. It is a—a robbery, if you like—a false trust.'

'Money?' asked innocent 'Cilla, leaving her hand in his passively, submitting to the painful pressure with a new gladness, believing that love, and not a meaner passion, had impelled it. She was agitated, and, gazing at him with dewy eyes, wondered at the hard, cynical look in his face, which she had never seen before.

'Never mind,' he said evasively; 'you would not understand. It is all over now; I did not pitch my life away, you see. I ask you again, would you have been distressed if I had done it? Would you have forgotten me after a week?'

'You know I could not forget you, when you have been such a friend; and I would be distressed.'

'Very well; then it is only fair to tell you what held me back from this madness.'

'What?' eagerly.

'You.'

'I?'

'Yes; you. Did you ever hear of Al-Sirat, the Mahommedans' supposed path to heaven?'

'No,' she said, ever so softly, her right hand still lingering in his, her left holding her note-book.

'They believe a bridge spans from earth to heaven—to paradise. It is so narrow that it has

been compared to a spider's thread or the razor's edge. The dead are supposed to pass over it with a pace in proportion to their virtues. The truly perfect skim it like lightning; the moderately perfect go it with the speed of a racehorse; those who are burdened with sin get over laboriously; but those who are overweighted tumble headlong into the abyss below—a polite name for that which is opposed to heaven. Now, I've got a belief of my own; I say the living as well as the dead may pass over such a bridge. I've been standing on it to-day; I've seen the awful abyss; the dead weight of my sins nearly sent me over, but I kept my balance when I thought of you; I said, "I'll live and reach paradise on earth if I look just straight ahead." My progress has been impeded through my own fault; but I am travelling there, and will reach it in safety if you will let me, if you will give me absolution for all sins of omission and commission. 'Cilla'—it was not sufficient that he held her hand; he drew nearer and put an arm about her; his voice fell sweet and low—'"'Cilla, you are my paradise. Will you shut its gates in my face? You will not—you will marry me; we are not friends of an hour. Say you forgive me.'

'Cilla whispered her answer, which may be

easily guessed, especially as Lockstud there and then said :

'Ah, now you are Priscilla Glade once more.'

The sun played through the branches over their heads, but left them in shadow. Again was it ominous ? The broken rose, denuded of most of its leaves —a withered calyx—was lying forgotten and trampled under his heel in the dust, its oracular petal never having been reached.

Priscilla's soul awoke again, alive with fervour and strong in thanksgiving ; but a passing thought clouded for a moment her new-found joy ; the uncomfortable vision of an irate, sharp-featured woman arose before her—the formidable aunt whom she had never seen, and whom she feared. She turned quickly, and asked plaintively :

'But what will Aunt Jessie say ?'

'Say ?' replied Lockstud with a self-satisfied smile—'that I have done the wisest thing of all my doings.'

'She will not scold or treat me coldly ?'

Lockstud laughed outright.

'Not unless you ask her for money.'

'I'm not likely to do that.' 'Cilla laughed too, and added gaily, 'Let us go home and tell mother.'

'And what about those notes?' he asked mischievously. 'Do you still intend to take them here?'

'Cilla flushed prettily—coyly.

'Neither here nor anywhere without your assistance.'

The notebook went back to the bag; and perhaps for the satisfaction of the reader it may be necessary to state that the notes never were taken, that the essay was never written, that Priscilla believed she had already received a prize before which all other prizes paled as meaner things to be left for other competitors.

A memo appeared on the first page of the notebook, beneath the words already written there—'Phillipia, March 17, 187—': 'HE DOES LOVE ME—POOR ME, THE HAPPIEST GIRL IN THE WORLD.'

In less than three months hence she signed herself Priscilla Lockstud.

CHAPTER II.

A LETTER, AND A GLIMPSE FOR PRISCILLA AT THE WRITER THEREOF.

When Theodore Lockstud was a month-old husband, he received a letter one afternoon at the bank: it was without signature and without date, and ran thus:

'Fool!—is your revenge sweet? You think you have been very clever, don't you? I say again, fool! You have cut the ground from under your feet. What is it to me? Well, it is this to me; for auld lang syne I must befriend you. I am able and willing to do it, though you don't deserve it; first with your heroics and sulks, and next with your hot-headed marriage.

'You thought it would revenge mine—it would spite me—when revenge and spite both must rebound on your own head. We are

young, you and I ; somebody else is not, and perhaps an early hard life makes itself felt now with advancing years. I have heard that it does ; but what does it matter now ?—the move is lost.

'Do you understand ? If December offers May riches, and all the luxuries that she must revel in, May would be a fool to refuse, especially when December completes the calendar, and May is less than half-way through.

'What is the paltry salary of a bank-clerk to an income that has multiplied itself over and over again out of acres and acres of wonderful land ? When one sees the prospect of securing that income, and hesitates about clutching at it with the first chance, then that one deserves a strait-jacket. Do you think I was born to be tied to a hypochondriac for fifty pounds per annum, to read the maudlin books she loved and I hated, and be at her beck and call every minute in the day ? What is the use of beauty if left "to blush unseen" ? I don't believe in girls pretending unconsciousness of their charms—not I. *I* don't pretend any way ; and if it was my good fortune that this same hypochondriac should happen to have a landlord visiting her sometimes, and visiting in the neighbourhood, and rolling in riches, whose sight was true

enough to make him critical, in spite of his years—to make him look upon me with admiration and love—it would have been sheer madness on my part, and base ingratitude, too, to have allowed other matters to interfere with my acceptance of so much worth and honour. He worships me, and I worship—well, the golden calf, if you like. I longed for rich dresses, jewels, servants, carriages, and a grand house, and I have them all now, with an infatuated husband given in; one can't have everything.

'We have been "doing" the colonies, visiting his plantations in Flindersland, and saw his broad acres in one place, and his houses in another, and streets of houses in another, and suburban lots in another. Oh, idiot! why do I write to you? I gnash my teeth and stamp my foot when I think of the stumblingblock you have raised. You know well enough what I mean. All this will be mine, only mine, some day—and soon; and, who knows? but for that stumblingblock might be yours. As you sow, so shall you reap. But I'm not vindictive. I will get you out of the harness you always railed at, and put you in something better. We are at home now—at Goolgun, Virginia Bay—a splendid place. We shall have a

formal reception on Thursday next. You had better break the ice and come and be introduced with your blandest expression on ; he won't take to scowls ; and bring HER with you. We shall have to meet sooner or later. But I shall be at City Park on band-day, probably alone. My lord hates music. Now burn this, for ashes, like dead men, tell no tales. *Verb. sap.*'

When Lockstud had finished reading this remarkable letter, he did not burn it at once. There was no need for signature ; he knew the writing—knew the writer ; and as he read his face darkened, his lip-corners fell ; he looked as he did that day in the church—the day he asked Priscilla Glade to marry him.

Bitter words rose to his lips, and the letter, instead of being consigned to the flames, was slipped into his pocket-book for a second, and more leisurely, reading at his own fireside later on.

His mouth quivered with wrathful epithet inaudibly spoken—with a smothered imprecation on all women alike ; yet his mind was busy planning a visit on the day alluded to — the 'formal reception'—a visit from Mr. and Mrs. Lockstud to Mr. and Mrs. Jeremiah Goldwin.

The bank harness galled him more than ever.

While he was meditating, frowning, and munching his moustache-ends, his wife was sitting with Aunt Jessie.

After Priscilla's willing affirmative to Lockstud's pleading under the bamboo-trees, she determined to face the formidable aunt. Accordingly, within a week of their betrothal, with a wavering courage, but quiet persistence prompted by duty, she accompanied him to his aunt's residence.

Mrs. Calliport (that is, Aunt Jessie) had her own reasons for a certain amount of suspense, and agitation too, in the prospect of meeting her niece-elect, for her nephew was very dear to her, and his welfare her sole care; therefore was she the more anxious to know that his choice of a bride was in all truth a wise one. Each woman had mentally drawn a likeness of the other; but as Lockstud had portrayed Priscilla more faithfully to his aunt than he had described his aunt to Priscilla, the latter experienced a surprise and reversal of feeling to which the former was not subjected.

When Priscilla was ushered into Mrs. Calliport's bedroom, and saw Theo's aunt for the first time, she somehow felt relieved of previous

terrors at once, as one who, setting out on a dark road believing it to be beset with dangers, suddenly perceives a light close at hand, to guide his footsteps and cheer him on. She saw a woman who was about forty years of age, yet almost youthful in face, with her clear pinky complexion, and eyes exactly like her nephew's. As a foil to the youthful aspect of countenance, she was supplied with rather a superabundance of flesh, which gave a tendency to a double chin ; but she was tall as well as corpulent, so that the plumpness was not of that disproportion which makes a short fat individual conspicuous, and she was generally admitted to be a fine woman.

It was one of her bad days—one necessitating isolation from the chill air of a misty atmosphere. She had not the appearance of an invalid, nor was she always confined to her bedroom, but asthma threatened and enforced caution, and dyspepsia was chronic with her, disposing to a nervous, fidgety manner at times, and a strong desire to discuss her ailments with anybody willing to listen.

She was said to be very rich, but her surroundings not being absolutely luxurious enough to testify to that fact, she was also said to be parsimonious.

She loved dogs and birds, and indulged her love of them, for an aviary of birds chattering and piping stood at the veranda side as you entered, and barking dogs greeted the occasional visitor. She was now reclining on a couch at the foot of her bed when Priscilla advanced. A white woollen shawl enveloped her shoulders. A soft rug was drawn up as far as her waist, and her head was pressed back against, and framed in, a pillow cased with the whitest of linen, edged with deep cambric frilling. The position asserted the double chin more decisively as it bulged on her fair round throat. She was like her nephew—that struck Priscilla immediately on entrance, and perhaps accounted in a measure for the sudden dispersion of fears—like him in his kindest moods, as she had always seen him.

The sarcastic smile was absent, and there was no scorn to mar the ever-present benevolence of expression which lent a sweetness to her countenance never to be found in his. Her forehead was high and arched at the temples, unlike his; but her hair, falling low in wavy bands, hid this distinction of feature, and therefore completed the strong likeness.

It was a large lofty room, with an island-like square of carpet in the centre, surrounded by

about three feet of well-waxed boards. There were pink-flowered chintz curtains on the French lights, which led to a balcony fronting the house, and corresponding curtains adorning the bed. There was no more furniture than absolutely necessary to a bedroom; everything was clean, solid, and old-maidish in its primness. A silky, fluffy, bright-eyed little spaniel lay cosily on a chair at her side, his head pushed forward on his forelegs, his diamond eyes wide open, fixed on the approaching figure of one who was strange to him, and whose coming caused him no excitement whatever. A canary in the act of trilling its loudest, and hopping merrily from perch to perch as it hung in a dome-shaped cage at the farther end of the room, ceased trill and hop for a brief inspection of the newcomer. All windows and doors were closed, excepting one French light, which stood ajar sufficient for ventilation; while a faint odour of toilette-vinegar bréathed throughout.

'Aunt, this is 'Cilla,' said Theodore, in his off-hand way; and then with suavity: 'She longs to know you.'

Mrs. Calliport half lifted herself from the couch, smiled benignly as she clasped the tiny neatly-gloved hand in her own—large, white,

and firm—and drew her as closely as possible for a more affectionate welcome.

The formidable aunt kissed the button mouth, and Priscilla was moved to a spontaneous and reciprocal feeling, wondering at herself because fear was vanquished—wondering at Theodore for having excited it.

She sat talking and listening for quite an hour that afternoon, conscious of no restraint, but the pleasant sensation of an agreeable surprise. She made friends with the spaniel, who was introduced to her as Charlie, and, being won over by a caressing hand, walked from the chair straight on to her lap immediately near, to coil himself there confidingly into a silken ball. She was enchanted with Santley, the canary, whose little throat seemed ready to burst with song; and when at leaving Aunt Jessie said, 'You must be charitable, my dear, and spare some time from that Theo of yours to come and sit with me as often as you can,' she promised sincerely to come for her own pleasure, as well as for Mrs. Calliport's.

Both she and her mother then opened an intimacy which never faltered. They found it an easy matter to ignore what her nephew called 'fads,' and to sustain an admiring friend-

ship. Why he had misrepresented her to them, or why he could not see her as she was, or as they did, was somewhat inexplicable, until Mrs. Calliport herself let in some light on the subject during a confidential chat with Priscilla later on, when they had become firm friends.

'I am immensely relieved,' began the elder lady, 'to know that Theo is going to settle down. He needs a wife—a help-mate, such as you will be.'

'I'll try to be,' said 'Cilla, colouring at the implied praise, and industriously hem-stitching a twelve-inch square of cambric while Mrs. Calliport knitted.

'Of course you will; don't I know that? I thought there was something between him and that person'—Aunt Jessie mostly alluded to a late paid companion of hers as 'that person'—'who was employed by me once, for four months, and four months too long; but I was happily mistaken; for, as it turned out, she flew at higher game. Did he never mention her to you?'

'No.'

'No! Never spoke to you of Isabella Gimp?'

'No,' repeated 'Cilla, dropping her work and

looking with speaking eyes fixed on Mrs. Calliport's face; they said as plainly as possible, 'You tell me.'

'I suppose he didn't think it worth while,' said Mrs. Calliport. 'Well, she was one of the most selfish, conceited creatures it has been my misfortune to meet, and as fair as a goddess.'

'Her beauty could not have made much impression on him, else he would have told me.'

'Cilla said this innocently and lightly. She felt relieved, somehow, to hear Mrs. Calliport abuse the 'goddess.' It was wrong—unchristian, was it not? But even pure Priscilla Glade had her moments of erring humanity, while an uncomfortable fluttering disturbed her at the mention of 'something' having been between her Theo and 'that person.'

'Very likely.' Mrs. Calliport did not think it 'very likely' at all, but she had noted a change in expression and colour come and go, like a passing cloud before the sun, over the bright face turned to her, and thought perhaps she had said too much. Her hazel eyes, so like her nephew's, and quick to observe, were filled with tenderness as she said, 'Very likely,' and added, 'But she is married now—married well, as the world puts it; and you may rest assured he has forgotten her. I'd never be

bothered with her kind again. She was docile enough—too docile—and soft and plausible ; but somehow I always fancied she was laughing at me in her sleeve. Mind, I never found her out in any breach of faith, but was always expecting to do so. I never felt sure whether her sympathy was given in jest or earnestness, and I couldn't trust her with a word in confidence. It was much better for her to leave me, and now I have you I'm better pleased still. I do like to have young people about me.'

'But,' 'Cilla ventured to ask, 'don't you ever go out visiting like other people, and receive visits ?'

'Go out!' and here Mrs. Calliport's eyes and hands simultaneously expressed surprise, the former rolling upward for a momentary overdisplay of white, the latter extended on each side of her, palms outward, as if to ward off something unpleasant. 'I dare not go out,' she said, 'excepting in a close carriage, if the air is chilly, and then at mid-day. My real friends do come to see me sometimes, not waiting for return calls. They know how I suffer. Sometimes in the summer I go to see them. Mere acquaintances I don't bother about. I hope, my dear, you'll never know the physical ills which are mine—the iron band on the chest,

and the sword between the blade-bones. And then at night my breathing is so bad that it chokes me sometimes, and I have to sit up. Why, sometimes I'd like to lie down and die, but as soon as my breath works properly, you see, I pray to live; that's the worst of it; we are such poor creatures, not knowing what is best for us. I don't get over-much pity—you don't pity me now; I can read faces, and you are thinking this moment I'm the picture of health, and just a fussy old woman.'

'Oh, Mrs. Calliport!' cried 'Cilla, getting very red, and not feeling quite guiltless, because she was thinking of what Theo had told her about hypochondria, etc., and beginning to wonder if he was right, after all.

'You don't think I'm in blooming health, then?'

'How can you be if you suffer?'

'Well, many people do think so, and Theo is one of them. When he lived with me he was not thoughtful for my ailments; often in the midst of my suffering, or detailing my suffering, he would be thinking of something else, or look bored, or make some pretence for hurrying out of the room.'

'Oh!' again from the girl. 'Is that why you fell out?' She asked the question eagerly; it

was but natural she should long to know all the facts bearing upon the quarrel and subsequent reconciliation, since Theo had never enlightened her.

'He did tell you we had quarrelled, I see.'

Mrs. Calliport's face wore at this moment its severest expression, with a shadow of pain.

'Cilla dropped her work for the second time, and coloured furiously. 'Only that you had quarrelled, but never why—never why.'

'Ah!' and here the elder lady relieved the younger considerably by a little soft, melodious gurgle of a laugh. 'You are a very woman, and I like you, because your face can't dissemble. I don't care for faces that take one a long time to understand. Say what you mean, mean what you say — that's my motto, my dear, at all risks; and *look* what you mean, otherwise it is a lying face. You are anxious to know all about him, of course. One thing you must know is, that he is not faultless by any means. He is very dear to me, almost as dear as he is to you; but my love is not blind —blind love is a sorry mistake; don't you be blind, that is, if you would be a help to him and guard him from passions to which he is subject. Now, I suppose he has given you reason to believe that the quarrel was my fault, eh?'

'Cilla hesitated, and was about to reply, when Mrs. Calliport interrupted.

'Never mind—don't answer, I will spare you equivocation. I *know* he has done so, there! I wouldn't blame him so much for his faults, poor boy, for who is faultless? But I tremble for his all-absorbing sin—his utter inability of self-reproach—his thorough belief in himself. Constant companionship with such as you—love for such as you, my dear, may work wonders. The influence of a pure-minded woman is a guardian angel to a worldly soul. This is why I am so thankful that my wayward boy has found just the woman he needs for a wife and a moral help. I will tell you why we quarrelled and leave you to judge which of us was in fault. I think I am justified in defending myself.'

'You need not, Mrs. Calliport—that is, not to me,' spoke up 'Cilla.

It cost her an effort to say this much. She said it with her head bent over her work, with her heart palpitating just because her love was not quite blind, though deep and earnest. Theo had misrepresented his aunt; why should he not misrepresent the quarrel? She had understood him to be the martyr, and Mrs. Calliport persecutor, until now. There was something in the blunt honesty of his

aunt's manner that defied doubt of her statements, and she believed that she would in time make Theo have a full and perfect knowledge of the real worth of his sole surviving relative, and that his misrepresentations were not the result of anything like mendacity, but of his impatience with failings which in his estimation completely counteracted virtues.

'You need not,' she said lowly. 'I know Theo misunderstands you sometimes, and that you are too fond of him to quarrel for nothing.'

Mrs. Calliport's plump fingers busied themselves with her ball of shaded red wool, which was fast diminishing as a tiny petticoat developed. She paused for a moment, her breath wheezing slightly, her eyes moistened, and then she began abruptly :

'We quarrelled over money. He thinks I've got money for him to make ducks and drakes of. I have tried to be as a wise mother to him—not to be foolishly indulgent. His mother died in giving him birth ; his father was already gone then, so that he was an orphan, but not a dependent one. His mother and I had been left early orphans too—left to the care of trustees, one of them appointed our guardian. We were sent to boarding-school, but my sister, six years older than I, left before I did, and

married when quite young. She went through a lot of trouble; I never saw her husband; he was gone before Theo was born, as I told you, and—and she died. Before she died our guardian sent for me—some time before; but I was very young, and could not understand much that I saw and wondered at. When I was old enough to understand and had a husband, I learned that my sister had bequeathed her child to my care. My sister and I were entitled to a legacy of £5,000 when of age; hers reverted to her child, the interest to be employed for his education and maintenance. He was sent to boarding-school—that is my regret—next to college; at eighteen he was expelled for some offence, and came to live with me entirely, when he was too old for me to take him in hand and undo the harm worked by wild associations. I tried my best to do a mother's duty; he was everything to me. I was a widow; I had lost two dear boys of my very own; I thought he would be as a son to me. I wanted him upon attaining his majority to enter a profession, but he was not stable enough for steady application to one thing; he wanted to travel and see life, he said: and so he did—so he did, my dear. He had what is vulgarly called his fling. He flung his £5,000 broadcast, I can tell you; scattered a splendid

legacy, ruined himself, got into debt—actually into debt, which I had to clear when he came back to me, a prodigal son, repentant and promising reform.'

Priscilla's work lay idly in her lap ; there was a fascination for her in a recital which laid bare all the past of the man she loved too dearly, and perhaps unwisely. The fascination which a funeral procession might have excited in her, with the glass-windowed hearse, the nodding plumes, and that long narrow box within, silver-decorated, flower-strewn, bearing its burden of chilled clay—a thing once of warm flesh and blood ; the long line of mourning-coaches, the slow, measured tread of the horses, the bowed heads and sobbing friends ; the whole something to attract even while it repels, and from which we turn conscious of a heart-sinking and indefinable awe, though the dead be unknown and the mourners strangers. She saw her lover exactly as described, and her eyes filled with tears ; but she also saw him, as she believed, a reformed man. She buried the sins of him—the wild boyish follies—and fancied his soul arising purified out of its remorse, and so she faltered :

'Poor Theo ! how unhappy he must have been, and how thankful you to know he really intended to reform !'

'Yes; and I made a promise too—to myself: I vowed never to leave him entirely to himself again, but to watch over and guard him to the end of my days; so when he set his heart on coming to Australia, where he would not be known, and where he could begin a better life, I came with him. And it is just as well, for the London fogs would have taken years from my life. Well, we settled in Phillipia, and I found a place for him in the bank where he is now; but after he considered he had had enough of it to suit him, he wanted something bigger. Just when I thought he was benefiting by my discipline, he showed himself dissatisfied. What do you think he wanted of me?'

'What?'

'Only the loan, he said, of £1,000, on interest for three years, to go into business with; to enter a partnership with somebody he knew nothing at all about, and to let the money slip through his fingers again. I knew what was best for him; he would have burnt his fingers—would have been a baby at business. I refused him point-blank. It was Hobson's choice for him to remain at the bank, and so we quarrelled—that is, he quarrelled, said some high and mighty words about his independence, and some disrespectful things about me, and

went off in high dudgeon, vowing never to come back. But he did want to come back when he cooled down, and I refused to receive him, you see.'

The knitting-needles flew quicker and quicker under Mrs. Calliport's dexterous handling—flew without the aid of eyes very often, and at long intervals, the eyes flashing and bent on her willing listener. It was a rare treat for her to be able to talk like this to somebody trustworthy; for the girl would never betray her confidence, and loved her promised husband too well to give more than a sigh or a tear for sins she considered consigned to their grave without fear of resurrection.

Nevertheless, 'Cilla looked pale and distressed.

'Don't think any more about it, my dear,' said Aunt Jessie. 'I dare say he was sorry for it afterwards, else he wouldn't have pleaded for forgiveness; but you wanted to know why we fell out, and there you have it; and I have given you my side of the story with a long preamble, because there's no knowing how he still views my action, though he is respectful and deferent enough now; and I value your good opinion too much to let myself appear to you under a false light, so that you perceive

in me a selfish woman after all, since I must show you the spots on your sun, my dear, which may falsify me. Only think leniently of me if your Theo still chafes under fancied injury. All the time I was holding myself aloof from him I was dying to see him—to throw my arms round his neck—but was restrained by a Brutus-like motive; he deserved to be punished. He is all the better for it now, and will still improve now that he has chosen a good girl for his wife. He will make a good husband, I believe; if he has faults he has merits; but you must not let him have his own way in all things, but be firm. You must rule him sometimes, but do it so gently that he shall be unconscious of the ruling.'

Mrs. Calliport looked at the mild-faced 'Cilla for several seconds intently, and was thinking, as she advised, of the docility and submission written there, but hoping her 'word in season' would develop more forcible qualities hitherto latent; but 'Cilla was not born to command or guide.

It was in this way that she received much enlightenment relative to her Theo's disposition. She learned many things of which she never spoke to her mother, remembering her

warning. His faults could not make him the less dear to one who was confident of existing virtues, like charity, covering a multitude of small sins, the mere errors of an impulsive temperament. Her mother, perhaps, was not so conscious of his worth as she was, and would have been ready to insist on breaking off the engagement had she heard Aunt Jessie's story; but Mrs. Glade remained in happy ignorance.

To Priscilla Glade, Theodore Lockstud was no level, monotonous plain already watered and tended, offering her a tranquil haven for the rest of her life, but as a majestic rock, the more entrancing for its rugged, steep sides and jutting points, where she would plant her foot in safety, and strew flowers and scatter herbage to remedy the sharp, cutting extremities, to soften its whole aspect, to create smiles for frowns, and be rooted in that paradise he had said life would be with her. So the poor little dreamer lifted her eyes to the grand summit of the rock and let a fancied blaze of sunshine dazzle her sight, and from peak to peak saw golden bright-hued butterflies flit which she thought to chase and grasp when her wifehood came.

It did come, and the short honeymoon of two weeks passed like a beautiful dream—

passed for ever. Aunt Jessie had made a wonderful effort to attend the wedding, and she had given a handsome wedding present, represented in the furniture and general fittings of a cosy little home. 'Cilla was beaming over with gratitude; her husband did not go into ecstasies, but observed in an undertone, 'She won't die of this stroke of generosity, either.' He was bitterly disappointed; he had been living quite a model life, and he had taken a saint of a girl to wife, and where was his reward? A goody-goody little mouse of a creature ever at his side; a toy house and capital spent in gimcrack furniture, when he thought his whole conduct would have led up to the wider opening of Mrs. Calliport's purse-strings as an outlet for that coveted £1,000, over which he had so justly lost his temper. But no such thing; she was adamant. And as he read that letter in the bank—that letter without date or signature—he bit his lips and moustache-ends, and thought his marriage a failure in more ways than one.

He cursed the writer, and yet with the bitter invective on his lips the smouldering ash of a love at his heart's core revived into unholy flame with the fanning of that letter. He began to look forward to next band-day at

City Park, when the writer had said she would be probably alone, and already determined that she should not be.

His wife, we have said, was with Aunt Jessie; the latter still at her knitting, which work Priscilla had discovered was for the benefit of certain poor families needing warm petticoats and socks, etc. Here was another point borne home to her mind to refute her husband's condemnation of his aunt as a 'niggardly, selfish old party.'

Mrs. Calliport was in her drawing-room below her bedroom, to which it corresponded in size, with broad windows which overlooked a wide stone veranda, with a flight of steps leading to a front garden and thence to the street. Priscilla had been listening to quite a lamentation of aches and pains, putting in occasionally an ejaculation of sympathy. Sorry for infirmities which she could not remedy, tone and manner declared her pity. But when Mrs. Calliport had exhausted the subject of self without having had any interruption, and felt as relieved as the over-plethoric might after bloodletting, she gave a great sigh, smiled gratefully on the patient little visitor, and said:

'There! that's enough about me, isn't it? You are a good soul to listen to a miserable

woman's growling so long, but the growl does me good sometimes when I know it touches a sympathetic heart. You are a great comfort to me, my dear.'

Priscilla was about to reply, but did not, for in that moment a handsome carriage drawn by a pair of glossy bays, and with liveried coachman and footman, dashed up to the curb-stone before Mrs. Calliport's house, and drew all her attention to itself. Lost in her admiration of the whole turn-out—her face was pressed against a window-pane that she might see carriage and occupant the better:

'Aunt Jessie, Aunt Jessie!' she cried; 'see, somebody is coming to see you—some queen to invade your peaceful domain. See!'

Aunt Jessie gathered up her knitting in her two hands and walked the few steps to the window as quickly as she could, and what she saw evidently did not please her.

The footman was running up the front steps with cards in hand; a lady was seated in the carriage gracefully lounging—a beautiful woman beautifully attired. Mrs. Calliport peeped from behind the window-curtain, and vented something like a grunt.

'Who could dream of her coming to see me, and like *that*, too? She looks like a fashion-

plate. Her quick eyes have caught us at the window, perhaps; I can't say, "Not at home."'

Aunt Jessie almost mumbled this to herself, and Priscilla, wondering, said:

'Why, aunt, who is it? You know the queen?'

'Pshaw, child! don't call her queen. Why, that is Isabella Gimp!'

Then came a quick rap at the street-door and a ringing of the bell, a servant's hurrying tread across the hall, and the snap of a dog. Priscilla rose hastily, and held out her hand.

'Good-bye, aunt. I've got a long way to go to get home, and—and I don't care about meeting her at all.'

'Oh, you wicked, lucky little sinner, you will leave her comfortably alone, and I must receive her with the best grace possible. Well, run; she's at the door. Good-bye.'

And so Priscilla fled through a back-door, glad to escape the woman who had been described to her as a goddess, who had suggested the idea of something having been between her and Theo. She had never forgotten that, and now it occurred to her that it was strange he should have been impervious to her charms. She was certainly beautiful, too grand a lady

altogether for a bank-clerk's wife to open an acquaintance with—too haughty-looking to tempt an intimacy.

Urged by these reflections she hurried away, and arrived at her little home—which was quite a long distance from Mrs. Calliport's residence—when darkness had well set in. She found the table laid for the evening meal, the lamp set in the centre dimly burning, and her husband sitting before the fire in the dining-room.

He was bending forward, elbows on knees, with a letter in his hand, which he was reading by the light of the cheery blaze.

CHAPTER III.

SHADOWS CAST BY COMING EVENTS.

The fire crackled and blazed cheerily, its flickering light playing on Theodore Lockstud's face with a ruddy glow, in strange contradiction to its expression, which was dark and scowling.

He never heard his wife enter, nor did he know she was in the room and just behind him until her hand was gently laid on his shoulder, and she asked, 'Good news, dear?'

Her touch roused him immediately, and the letter became a crumpled mass in his palms as he turned sharply and faced her.

'You are very late,' he said, ignoring her question. 'Where have you been?'

'Only with Aunt Jessie. She had a bad night, poor thing! but is better to-day.' Then, noting his flurried manner and the crushed letter, she asserted interrogatively, 'You have had bad news?'

'Well, no, not exactly,' he replied. 'It need not worry you. There it goes.'

And there it did go straight into the leaping flame, thrown from his grasp with a sudden jerk. And then, not content with that, he took up the tongs and held it between them over the coals with something of the ferocity of a cannibal toasting his victim.

The blaze danced around, lashing and licking till the letter was reduced to ash, and separated in flaky particles feathery light to fly up the chimney.

Priscilla's cheeks lost their colour. It was not the act of burning the letter which distressed her, but the manner of it. She watched him as he held the tongs in a vice-like grip, as if with cruel, brutal strength; as he dropped them again when they had served his purpose, letting them fall with a jangle on the fender.

'You have had bad news, and you won't tell me,' she persisted.

'I tell you not to worry; that is sufficient. Worry won't cure it, if it is bad news.' He stood up as he spoke. 'Perhaps you will be good enough to remove your bonnet and cloak, and let me have something to eat.'

She did not ask any more questions just then. This bristling, pricking humour of his

was best left alone; but after dinner, when he sat down again in the little drawing-room on his own especial easy-chair set before the fire, and smoked a cigarette, she drew a stool, and sat down on it, almost at his feet.

She allowed him to smoke in silence for several minutes, but, suddenly moved to speak by the thoughts agitating her heart, she folded her hands over his knee, and, looking wistfully up into his face, said:

'Theo, do you want money?'

He answered with his cigarette still between his lips and muffling his words, and with his eyes on the fire:

'Want money?' He laughed rather contemptuously. 'Of course I want it—as much as I can get. Who does not?'

'I know that, dear. I mean, I know that nobody can get along without it; but—I thought perhaps——' She hesitated. 'I thought you might be in debt, and that if you were perhaps I could help you, because I have a very little of my own.'

She was thinking of a crisp little bundle of notes which Aunt Jessie had given her for her private purse, and which she was hoarding only for his benefit, to revert to him in the shape of presents in the future.

'In debt? Your imagination is pretty warm this evening; the sooner you let it cool down, the better.'

'You have not answered me,' she said quietly. 'Are you in debt?'

'What reason have you for these absurd questions? You haven't had to entertain the bailiff any time this week to my knowledge.'

'You never looked so troubled before, to my knowledge, Theo,' she answered. 'If it is not debt I am more than thankful, because debt is worse than an illness—it is an illness. Mother suffered from it once, and of course I suffered with her, and know all about it. It seemed to me that it was your trouble to-night. You never looked so wretched.'

He shifted uneasily on his chair, took his cigarette from his mouth, knocked the ashes out into a little plate on a small table at his side, and before he replaced it said with unwarranted chilliness:

'You seem to be labouring under some delusion. I am quite well; I am not in debt, and I shall feel obliged if you will drop the subject.'

The cigarette went back to his lips, and again he smoked in silence for a short time.

She withdrew her eyes from his face, and began to stare at the fire.

'How shall I guide him,' she thought, 'if he will not give me his full confidence? I grope in the dark. He thinks I am a child—not to be trusted.'

Presently he quite startled her with a little considerate speech almost significant of tenderness.

'You must be lonely here while I am absent,' he began, in quite a changed tone. 'Your mother can't come to you often. How would you like to make some new acquaintances?'

She looked up at him gratefully, and said:

'I don't want anybody, dear. I am like that woman in the Bible—"I dwell among my own people." I am content, wanting nothing while I have you, and mother, and Aunt Jessie.'

All her soul was stirred in the depths of her eyes, fixed on him, for she honestly meant what she said. He made an impatient movement as he replied, with his cigar now held aloft, and his sarcastic expression very strong:

'That is all very well, but we are remote from Bible days; and, besides, I think that woman—if she ever existed—was a fool to refuse a social lift when it was hers for the asking, and is no guide for practical folks of this age. It may be absolutely necessary to make friends—in fact, I wish it, understand.

How is a bank-clerk to make headway, I ask you, without a friendly push—somebody to back him?'

Here he paused, as if studying the question, and seemed to have lost the thread of his talk, until she gently reminded him:

'Somebody to back you, you were saying.'

'Yes, exactly; that's it.' He frowned at the fire, and his cigarette was paling to ash between his fingers. 'Somebody to back me, and rich and influential people—friends of mine—can and will do this backing. They are within my reach.'

'Are they?' she said quite simply.

'Yes, and we must call upon them.'

'You and I?' she said, this time submissively; but the tone, charged with reluctance, made him repeat her own words with a certain decisiveness, warranted to check any opposition did she wish to oppose.

'You and I.'

'When? Soon? Who are they? Where did you meet them?' she queried excitedly, with an undefined dread of having to meet people whose social position so towered above their own.

'When?' answered her husband, 'why, next Thursday; that's their day at home. Who

are they? Mr. and Mrs. Goldwin. He is not young, not handsome, not brilliant; but he is a long-headed fellow, and partly owing to that, as well as to luck, he is something better than the whole three put together—he is a millionaire, though not a society man, but society is very fond of him all the same. Are you satisfied?'

She was fain to be, though he had not answered her last question, and she said almost below her breath:

'A millionaire, and we are to call upon him and his wife.'

He caught the words, however, and put his veto down once more on her disinclination, with his own provoking chilly authority of manner.

'That is what I propose,' he maintained.

She did not dare to advance any pros or cons. Rebellion or disobedience, she told herself, would be no ally at all in assisting her to rule or to throw that invisible chain about him which her aunt Jessie had recommended.

She was treating him like a gouty invalid—with all the gentleness and leniency of a well-trained nurse—careful not to hurt the offending limb in an attempt to relieve it of the painful pressure of bandage, which he, mulish-like, objected to have touched or removed.

Muddy currents fouled his temper this evening, and she, trying to trace the source of the muddiness, floundered out to a sea of supposition, prompting a second rush of interrogation, playing detective very badly.

Her hands were still folded over his knee, and her face upturned to his, as she asked, woman-like :

'Is she pretty? Nice? Have you seen her?'

He threw his spent cigarette in the fire, and watched it consume as he replied :

'Wait till you can judge for yourself; my opinion may not count.'

'Then you have seen her?'

'Yes.'

'And him.'

'Yes.'

'Is she young?'

Again he answered in the affirmative, and still studying the fire.

'And he is old, you say?' continued Priscilla, with a vague idea that the Goldwins were expected to find a salve, somehow, for whatever was so surely troubling him this night, and that her questions would batter at his reserve to some purpose. 'And he is old, you say?'

'Old enough to be her grandfather, nearly.'

'Well, he must be good and noble,' asserted the unsophisticated 'Cilla, 'for her to marry him.'

'Probably,' said her husband. She was not looking at him just then, and consequently could not see how very disagreeably his mouth was curved. 'He must be, as you say, noble and good. Millionaires are always noble and good, of course.' There was a sneer in the tone, however, which could not escape her, especially as he went on: 'With friends ever at their elbow and women at their feet.'

'You don't mean that she married him just because he is a millionaire?' She looked at him inquiringly.

'My words are open to that construction.'

'Oh, Theo, don't look like that! don't talk like that! don't think so unkindly of us poor women!' Then emphatically: 'I would have married you without a sixpence.'

'Yes; and you would go begging at the street-corners, singing, perhaps, for something to eat and something to wear. People who marry without sixpence deserve to be sent to the poor-house. It is a good thing for you that one of us is practical.'

She removed her hands from his knee and her eyes from his face, and began to gaze at the coals again with the least pain at her heart. She could not understand him; he had seemingly condemned the mercenary woman, and yet was inclined to scoff at herself because she was nothing of the kind. After a pause she looked up again. 'Theo.'

He answered her with a slight movement of his head, turning his face towards her, and commenced to roll another cigarette.

Then she began again, with a desperate effort to find a clue to his present temper, with persistent little digging questions, which seemingly did probe a little deeper than she intended, for when she asked, 'Did you meet her before you met me? Where did you meet her? Do tell me,' he made a sudden plunge of his body as if he had been pricked, and his long, white, muscular fingers crushed the cigarette and rendered it useless. With a smothered ejaculation he threw the thing from him and proceeded to busy himself with the manipulation of another before he spoke, and then, as if with sudden compunction, or probably a wish to erase the effects of his implied annoyance, he laughed rather artificially, and told her that he quite expected to see her dwindle down to a

mere interrogation point very soon if she did not cease plying questions.

She did not laugh too ; his action and words, as he plunged and anathematized, had startled her. Ignoring his attempt at wit and amiability, she said quietly :

'I would like to know all about her if I am to be an acquaintance, that's all.'

'Well, that's natural,' he replied, still anxious to be amiable. 'I met her after I had met you, and if she had not married four months ago, you would have met her too at Aunt Jessie's when you first called there with me. She was her companion.'

It was now Priscilla's turn to start, with a new excitement.

'What?' she cried. 'Isabella Gimp! You don't mean Isabella Gimp!'

'You evidently know her already,' he said, throwing a side-glance at the flushed face and that rounding of the eyes which meant surprise. 'I do mean Isabella Gimp.'

'No,' she replied, still with rounded eyes, 'I don't know her ; but I have seen her—and only this afternoon.'

'Oh!' Another side-glance, and then : 'You will permit me to question now, I presume? Where did you meet her?'

'I never met her; I saw her in the carriage outside Aunt Jessie's door; she was about to visit her, and I saw her first through the drawing-room window, wondering who she was, until Aunt Jessie came and looked too, and said, "That's Isabella Gimp."'

'My aunt might have done her the honour of calling her by her married name.'

'She was too excited just then, I suppose, to think of the change of name.' Then, after a little pause: 'So she is Mrs. Goldwin?'

'Exactly,' and Theo bent forward to ignite a match at the fire, and then lit his second cigarette.

The surprise faded from the young wife's face, and quite a sad expression took its place. She was silent and full of thought; so silent that her husband, wondering of what she was thinking, looked strangely at her as she sat at his feet, her hands clasped in her lap, and a pair of sad brown eyes fixed on the fire, which was losing its ruddy glow, needing fresh fuel, and corresponding with her own condition just then in her dejection, and the lack of one kind word from him to renew the vivid pleasure and delight always felt in his society before. She was miserable because of this Mrs. Goldwin—*née* Isabella Gimp—with whom she was to open an intimacy so soon; because even Theo had

hinted that she had married the millionaire and not the man; because she was so beautiful, and was no stranger to her husband; because Aunt Jessie had once thought there was something between the 'goddess' and him, and had called her 'that person,' showing that contempt had been excited. These reflections begat within her a feeling hitherto unknown, and made her disturb Theo somewhat by suddenly turning her face to his and meeting his eyes studying hers, to which there came a melancholy tenderness and shining unshed tears. She thought she saw love in his look, and with that she rose from the stool, and, perching herself on one of his knees, she put her arms around his neck like a child and pressed her cheek lovingly against his as she whispered: 'She is very beautiful, Theo.'

He could not resist this clinging. He twined a responsive arm about her, and his face softened. It pleased him to be caressed, and perhaps a momentary pang of remorse, a pricking of conscience moving his features to show pity and warmth, impulsively nerved his arm to hold her closer to him for a second as she nestled confidingly.

'Do you think so?' he asked, more gently than he had yet spoken this evening.

'Don't you?' she asked.

'She is passable; but women don't always see another woman's beauty with men's eyes, or most likely they won't.'

Now, if 'Cilla had been wise she would have said no more of Mrs. Goldwin; but the subject had a fascination for her, and so she went on, still clinging:

'Theo, it is a wonder, isn't it? that you did not fall in love with her.'

He puffed at his cigarette; his arm loosed its hold about her waist, and his knees began to shift as if her weight was cumbersome.

'I am tiring you,' she said, resuming her lowly position, and then, continuing the subject: 'She is beautiful, but not good, I think. Aunt Jessie dislikes her, and not unjustly, I'm sure; and though I can't help saying she is beautiful, neither can I quite help disliking her. You mustn't be angry with me.'

'Aunt Jessie has been prejudicing you'—he spoke with the old hard tone again; his brows were knitted, and sullenness came back to his features—'and you swear by Aunt Jessie, of course?'

'No, she did not say much; but there's something about her which is not pleasant, that makes me wish you did not want me to go and see her.'

'How was it you were so late this afternoon?' he asked, desirous of changing the conversation, and letting her understand it to be objectionable.

'Chatting and not heeding the time.'

'Listening to aunt's lamentations, if the truth were told.'

'I like her, for all her "lamentations," as you call them, Theo; and you do, too, but you won't admit it. You must—you should, after all she has done for us.'

This was not the happiest turn she could have given to the dialogue; it was a step only from quicksand to quicksand.

'Has she done so much?' he asked, with the sneer uppermost; 'I was not aware of it.'

She looked at him in some surprise. She believed Aunt Jessie to be thoroughly good and generous, and especially towards themselves, so she gently reminded him:

'She was a mother to you, in the first place.'

'Indeed!' very sarcastically. 'You seem to know more than I do. Yes, she was good enough to send me off to school, and pay for my education and maintenance with my own money, though she was married well, and could have borne the expense; but her sense of justice, to herself, was keen. I never cost her a farthing

until I lived with her when a lad, and that was a *quid pro quo* affair. She was lonely—a childless widow—and my presence under her roof supplied a want, that's all, for which she paid in kind with meat and drink and shelter.'

'But, Theo——'

He jumped up from his chair and began to pace the twelve-foot square room in wrath and excitement, unable to sit quietly any longer, and next spoke in raised tones:

'I say she has done comparatively *nothing* for me; but you side with her—you encourage her in her whims and caprice, and run me down together!'

'Oh, don't say that! Why get angry?' she pleaded. 'You know she came out to Australia for your sake.'

'For her own sake; she was glad to hurry me out of England. I was a seedy, unlucky nephew, no credit to her, so she came away where she and I would not be known. There was self underlying all her actions.'

'And kept you here in Phillipia?' she rather boldly argued, in the firm belief that she would make him think as she did.

'For the same reason as before—for company's sake.'

'Ah! you are out of temper to-night,' she

further ventured to say, 'and it makes you unjust.'

'Unjust! You are unjust—she is unjust. No doubt she has told you a string of falsehoods about me, made me out a prodigal son from her point of view, not from mine; the fatted calf has never been slain, and I have deserved it.' He spoke an octave higher now, while making the room vibrate with his passionate strides. 'You can run me down with her as much as you like; you can believe what you like—and you may believe this too, that I should have been a rich man this day but for that false motherhood which she rams down my throat and yours—the mean, unnatural conduct of one who should have befriended me.'

'Oh, Theo!' she cried, in a voice ready to break with suppressed sobs. 'She loves you dearly—dearly! You——'

Theo cut the sentence short by striding through the door out of the room.

She heard the street-door slam to with a force which made the room shake, and she knew he had gone out. She experienced a sense of suffocation, stretching forth her arms as if to grope through smoke and escape from fire—the fire of domestic broil. The task of guiding an unreasoning, obstinate nature with

an invisible chain was totally unfitted for her, and she was learning to understand this : she had succeeded only in vexing him and driving him from home with angry feeling at his heart, and his displeasure was more than she could bear.

With her throat swelling and her eyes filling she made a mental vow to let him have his own way in all things ; she would not employ any chain whatsoever, unless to put it round her own neck for him to lead her ; she would be Katherine, and allow him to be Petruchio, if he chose to be Petruchio.

He had been looking at her very lovingly, she thought, and she had caught him in the act when he least expected it. The look which she construed into an amorous glance had impelled her to rise and make that active demonstration of affection towards him—that clinging caress which had gratified his vanity, that tenderness not to be suppressed even by his withering, cynical blasts of temper.

And again she wondered why he had not fallen in love with Isabella Gimp's bright beauty, which he had called 'passable,' and if she, Isabella, had cared for him at all, and why Aunt Jessie should have thought something had been 'between them,' and what it was in the

beautiful face—which she had observed rather closely as she stared through the window into the carriage at her aunt's door—that was repulsive to her ; but no answer came.

'Perhaps,' she told herself, 'Aunt Jessie has prejudiced me, as Theo says, and I must try to like her, because he wishes it ; and it is for his benefit, after all, and I have blundered, as I always shall and always have, in attempting to make him think differently. He must have his own way and be happy, for in his unhappiness I shall be the most miserable woman in the world. And, oh dear, he did look angry !'

Thus for the sake of peace Priscilla Lockstud sheathed a very blunt sword of contention at once and for ever, and slipped quietly into a nonentity. She looked about her for something to do to keep her mind from dwelling on her husband's anger, and so she opened a small book-case, which fitted into a recess on one side of the fireplace, to let her hand hover about this book and that, hesitating in her choice, and ultimately selecting a yellow-back, which she carried to the chair just vacated by Theo.

Again she sat on the stool, and, resting the book on the seat of the chair, she opened it and tried to read, but she never turned a page ; for her intelligence was at work struggling to

read her husband's character and his trouble. Her queries had led to nothing but contumely, and the desired clue was as far off as ever. He was to her as a foreign tongue which she was powerless to master. It was a study that made her brain dizzy and her heart sick.

When he returned about an hour after, his temper having been subdued somewhat by the out-door air, it was to find the fire dead and his wife asleep. Her head had fallen forward on the book with her right arm arched about it and a cheek pressing the open page. Had he stooped to kiss the upturned cheek, he would have found it damp with unrestrained tears. He did not kiss it.

CHAPTER IV.

SHOWING HOW JERRY WAS FAVOURED BY MAMMON, BOWED TO CUPID, AND TROUBLED FIDUS ACHATES.

Virginia Bay was one of those pretty broad nooks which Phillipia offers now as suburbs. It was laid out in clean wide streets, metalled roads, and flagged pathways, mostly inclined to steepness, where private homes unpretentious and houses lordly were linked occasionally, and sometimes stood alone—houses towering many feet with double balconies, from which the harbour could be revelled in when the sense of the spectator was appreciative enough of Nature's glories to become enthusiastic. Even its streets commanded a view of the distant waters: here a glimpse—there a broad expanse, twinkling in the sunshine, rippling in the breeze or frosted or glass-like according to atmospheric influence, but ever enchanting.

One of its most imposing structures rose proudly within an emerald semicircle of stately trees erect as a bodyguard, and bore on the entrance gates—front and rear—a brass plate whereon was inscribed GOOLGUN. The approach proper to Goolgun led from a side street — lane-like — known as Washington Avenue, and was a succession of terraces all dotted with flower-beds and intersected with gravelled walks leading to a handsome lawn, where a fountain of stone stood in the centre, its base supporting four sturdy cherub boys, winged and nude, and grouped *dos-à-dos*, the cheeks of each puffed with the seeming effort of sending forth a fine spray through a stone trumpet to fall and splash with gurgling melody into the basin below.

Flights of broad stone steps, where a sphinx at each side apparently mounted guard, led from terrace to terrace, and lastly to the house itself, on to the broad veranda encircling it, with its massive pillars supporting the balcony.

One afternoon a lady sat on the veranda of Goolgun. She was quite alone, and her beringed fingers were interlaced and resting idly on her lap as she in bodily idleness stared before her with thoughts active and eyes seeing nothing. She wore a robe of olive-green plush

with a train curving at her feet with a graceful sweep. There were soft ruffles of costly lace at her throat and wrists, where jewels gleamed. Her hair—a fair mass of floss—was worked up into an elaborate arrangement of rolls and curls, and brushed upward from a marble-white forehead until it formed a pale golden arch, rippling and shining. The whole face might have been chiselled out of marble for its Minerva-like straightness and correctness of feature, its rigidity, its absence of colour, excepting where the carnation mouth gave a dash of warmth, and the glittering green-tinted eye imparted life.

It was not a happy face; Elizabeth's might have worn just such an expression when Essex's ring was not forthcoming and his hour of execution at hand; for in spite of its pride and power it was shadowed with pain, and disappointment, and bitterness. Its profile was turned towards the house, and opposite a French light leading to the drawing-room within.

Then quite suddenly a figure appeared at this door, the tall burly figure of an elderly man, well dressed, whose whole bearing implied satisfaction with himself and the world in general.

His eyes, full, rather bleared, but by no means dull, were bent upon the beautiful creature—who was thoroughly unconscious of his proximity—in admiration and reverence.

The eyes belonged to Jeremiah Goldwin. He was not a man given to sentiment or poetical rhapsody, yet was his heart full of a quaint poetry of its own at that moment—a dumb poetry which, if finding voice, might have cried out in rapture :

> 'I am monarch of all I survey ;
> My right there is none to dispute.'

With the thoughtless antics of a schoolboy, he trod noiselessly until he stood exactly behind her, still unheard, and then, bowing his head, he brought his face swiftly opposite hers, and kissed her full on the scarlet mouth. She started up with a little stifled scream, and, falling back from him, swept a dainty handkerchief—hastily withdrawn—across her lips with a passionate hand. It certainly looked like an attempt to sweep the kiss off.

'Well, Belle,' he began, as she rose to her feet, 'I am back, you see, as you told me to be, punctual to the minute, ready for the torture of our first day "at home." What's up?'

The question was elicited by her manner, which was unusual, the whole serenity of her countenance showing disturbance.

'You startled me so,' she replied with a little petulance and a pout; 'I don't like people to steal about me as if they were ghosts.'

He did not notice or heed the impetuous flourish of the handkerchief, but looked at her still with all the pride of possession burning within him tenfold. She was so beautiful even in her irritation, more beautiful with that queenly physique and attire which were hers. In spite of his years his soul swelled as ardently as that of any young Lochinvar, and his gnarled broad fingers caught at her slender jewelled hands to raise them to his lips, where a sort of apology formed itself at once, the action being more refined than the words.

'What a bear it was to frighten the poor dear, the pretty darling! Shall it be kicked?'

'Sit down and don't be stupid, Jeffrey.' 'Jeffrey' was a substitute of her own for the commonplace 'Jerry.' 'Remember we are on the veranda.'

She had recovered herself quite, and spoke gently.

'Well, what of that? May not a man kiss

his own wife? Let anybody look who likes; they will only envy me—me, lucky Jerry.'

With this he kissed her again on lips and forehead, with a rough defiance and an emphasis of proprietorship.

As soon as she could she retreated from this osculatory onslaught through the French light into the drawing-room, where he followed her with the idea of repeating the attack, when a knock at the door opening to the corridor made him suddenly collapse and sit demure enough in the first chair handy, as his wife said 'Come in.'

A footman entered bearing a card on a silver salver.

'Show the lady and gentleman here,' said Mrs. Goldwin, while she examined the card, and her mouth fixed itself in a hard line, with her pallor, if possible, increasing.

'Oh, there's a gentleman, is there? I'm glad there's a man to hit the thing off with,' said Jerry, as the footman disappeared. 'How many of these tickets are to be handed over this afternoon, I wonder? I'm not used to them.'

The bright blood had fled from her lips, and the card was suffering a wrench at her hands, and, noting it, he added in all good faith:

'Why, old girl, you don't seem to cotton to it very much, either. It is a kind of *noblesse oblige* for us both, I see, but we'll get used to it in time, I suppose, eh?'

'Yes,' acquiesced the lady, looking towards the door through which their visitors were to be ushered, 'these ceremonious calls are a plague sometimes.'

She felt that a plague of a kind was assailing her as she waited for the reception half in dread, half in longing.

'Mr. and Mrs. Lockstud,' announced the footman according to instructions, as he held the door open, and that lady and gentleman passed through.

Had Mrs. Goldwin been less self-occupied, she would have noticed that her husband sent a swift glance towards the door. She did not see it, nor did she hear him mutter, 'Lockstud again! confounded coincidence! and just at the start, too! Pshaw! what a fool I am! there might be a score of Lockstuds in the world.' And then, as he stood up at his wife's side, ready to receive, he saw a young man enter, whom he had previously met, and for some reason only known to himself he was relieved to find that this Lockstud was not a

total stranger. He also saw a dot of a woman, as yet quite unknown, a shy, sweet, delicate-looking little woman, whom he greeted with brusque heartiness, putting out his strong hand to grip hers as if it belonged to a long-tried, well-known friend.

'I'm very glad to see you, ma'am. I've had the pleasure of meeting your good man before,' he said.

The 'good man' at that moment was standing face to face and hand to hand with Mrs. Goldwin, whose back was turned to her husband; not for long, however, for she wheeled round swiftly as Lockstud said shortly:

'Mrs. Goldwin—my wife.'

And then the two women shook hands, while Priscilla, though quivering with nervousness, could not help noticing the deathly coldness of Mrs. Goldwin's hand, which struck chilly through her glove, as if it were ice.

It was an unpleasant clasp, and altogether an unpleasant experience of making an acquaintance, for she felt herself shrinking into comparative insignificance. Her self-esteem was small enough to fill her with painful humiliation in the presence of so much feminine beauty and wealth of adornment.

Her gaze, sent upward into the Minerva face, met a frigid look from the glittering eyes, and then the introduction was over, with a few formal words from each side.

'Sit down, Mr. Lockstud, sit down,' said Goldwin, ready and willing to forget that unpleasant association with the name of Lockstud which had set him muttering at a coincidence. 'We have had the pleasure of meeting before,' he repeated, 'and it won't be my fault if we are not the best of friends.'

'Nor mine, sir,' answered Lockstud, with the respectful deference of one addressing a senior and—a millionaire.

Then followed a general conversation, in which Priscilla, shy and nervous, took little part, contributing monosyllables merely. She was not sorry when the visit was over and she and Theo stood outside Goolgun. She now spoke openly, and though she would not disparage Mrs. Goldwin, her words implied that she was more prepossessed with the host than the hostess, and might have irritated Lockstud if he had heard them; but he did not: for he was temporarily unconscious of his wife's presence and voice, and she, taking his silence for unanimity of opinion, began to

rejoice inwardly as she walked on at his side somewhat elated.

In the meanwhile Mr. Goldwin was doing his best to acquit himself creditably as host, and so win his wife's praise.

Jeremiah Goldwin, or Lucky Jerry, as he was commonly called, was not an 'Admirable Crichton,' but, possessing certain qualities which were probably of a more widespread recommendation, he was in a fair way of becoming almost as popular as that exceedingly well-favoured but most unfortunate young man.

Was he not a millionaire, with a beautiful young wife and a palace of a home?

Money alone created for him a distinction, especially when its distribution marked the wonderful length of his purse; the wife, much inclined to hospitality and entertainment, excited approbation; the magnificence of his house called for eulogy; the whole evoked a popular enthusiasm.

Yet there had been a time when he was sans wealth, sans palace, sans wife, during which period the foundation of that enthusiasm had still to be laid—was awaiting the first pat of the trowel. Who is enthusiastic over a hard-working, patient-plodding man—be he never

so industrious—if success stands aloof? But Jerry plodded on, indifferent to censure, praise, or general opinion.

He had been in Australia for a number of years, and but a few knew of his antecedents, or why, with his possessions, he remained so firmly grafted on Australian soil. The main fact, freely discussed and accepted by those who knew him personally or by repute, was his monetary value, which was as an equipoise to mannerism or idiosyncrasy. Harmless eccentricity and hail-fellow-well-met characteristics—which in the days of struggle and toil might have been called bluntness and lack of dignity —were now sturdy props for a daïs whereon to mount a jovial popularity.

He was in truth a crude gem, and as it is well known that diamond-dust friction alone can produce the real brilliance of the diamond itself, no doubt his especial diamond-dust was the active agency forcing all his better qualities to the surface.

His wealth provided a glittering polish, pleasant in the eyes of his admirers. Jerry was as well known in Phillipia at the time of which I write as St. James's steeple or Captain Cook's statue is known in Sydney this day,

and, like them, being elevated, was to be looked up to He was lucky almost from the outset of his colonial career. Lucky when, in an encounter with the blacks—who were inclined to hostility, and were furious against the whites in some portions of the colonies in their rough-shod early days, believing them to be usurpers and despoilers—he was saved from the blow of a tomahawk, which might have bared his skull but for the intervention of a friend in need, who received it on his forearm instead, with a fell crack splintering its bone, a service which Jerry never forgot; for this friend in need became a sort of *protégé* of his, and was no other than that Washington Larry of whom we have already had a glimpse.

Jerry had wielded his pick and spear perseveringly and to some purpose in the Australian goldfields, his luck as a digger culminating in the finding of an immense nugget of gold (weighing 364 ounces 11 pennyweights) on the Bing-Bong Creek—at that time a newly-discovered alluvial goldfield in Georgius, for which he received £1,000.

The unearthing of such a treasure-trove was not a single instance in the very early days of Georgius; but, nevertheless, it was not an

everyday occurrence, and when it did happen was no secret abroad.

The nugget was called by Jerry himself the 'Jerry Flyer,' a jocular twist of his own name, as opposed to Jeremiah.

It was a most happy appellation, for the 'Jerry Flyer' became a sure stepping-stone to his subsequent fortune. It was as a strong pair of financial wings—capital wings in a double sense—wherewith to fly to a still more elevated Crœsus-starred perch. He was not slow in learning to understand the full and free expansion of these new-found pinions, for Jerry was a man of prudence—one of those men who have a wizard-like facility for knocking money out of impossible-looking places, who are brain-filled with forethought, who possess a sort of divining-rod in the glance of an eye, who see the glint of the groat and stoop to appropriate the coin—to grovel for it, if needs must—while others walk over it blindfold. In a word, he was a man born to make money, and he certainly fulfilled this cast of his nativity. His large head, with its great breadth from ear to ear, was a direct manifestation of his energies, combative, cautious, and acquisitive.

Nor was he devoid of real moral and manly sentiment. With a strong tenacity of purpose,

he never forgave an injury ; by the same rule he never forgot a kindness rendered, and if vice at all soiled his past life, it was surely due to certain exasperating conditions.

He was quite a young man when that £1,000 fell to his lot, and he was determined to invest a goodly portion of it.

Phillipia at this day was, though not youthful, yet far from anything like a perfect development ; but her budding maturity was in full action. As yet, the spring of her railroads had not begun, and her extent of city covered but a small area in comparison with what it does now, with the close of the nineteenth century coming on apace.

Suburbs now were accounted country then, and were only accessible by vehicular traffic, or on foot or horse.

Scrub and marsh and rock and gully, upon which fortunes have since been reared, were ignored, or gazed upon with indifference as to their future merits, or with little or no foresight for the possible fatness of the land to come. Over the said rocks and scrub Jerry began to flutter those wings of his. He bought certain craggy slopes and jungle-capped hills, and—if one may be pardoned for the wilful perversion of a Scriptural text—he cast his bread upon

the waters, to return to him after many days in rich loaves; for thirty years later the jungle had disappeared, the hills were cut down to an easy ascent, and the craggy slopes became streets, forming a pretty suburb, bay-embraced, and known as Virginia Bay.

Here Jerry's bread assumed the shape of bricks and mortar in about half a dozen of its principal streets. Several of his allotments had been disposed of to others on a ninety-nine years' lease for the erection of homes which loomed in the dim hereafter as inheritance for his unknown heirs.

Phillipia, maturing, had been pushing forward with mighty strength over the years since Jerry unearthed his nugget, and was now broadened out enough to gather within her outstretched arms the outlying lands and make them all her own, of which Virginia Bay had become a prominent feature.

But long before the unfolding of this particular suburb, and soon after his investment at Virginia Bay, Jerry was pushing his way over new roads to fortune and on other shores. It was when a rumour reached Phillipia of the flourishing prospects of North Flindersland, where stations were established, and from whence wool was being shipped south, and where, owing to one

man's almost prophetic conviction and well-directed zeal, a seaport near the stations, and more advantageous for the transit of the wool, had been discovered, and a town secured and established—when the Government, already stirred to some interest in the new township, had forwarded a surveyor to lay it out—that Jerry made up his mind to hie to the new land, to the new township know as Robsville, the new port called Kennedy Bay.

He did not go alone, for Washington Larry, his sworn mate, accompanied him, and so they discarded spade and pick and wended their way to North Flindersland.

Robsville at this period of its existence was a straggling place of scattered wooden shanties, humpies, and small square one-windowed shops on one side of the principal street, with an amphitheatre of mountainous hills and rocky heights, and a profusion of wild foliage, prickly pear, and mangrove springing indiscriminately in street or gully from rocky beds.

It was a sort of ugly gosling to Jerry; but, his divining-rod beginning to dance in his brain, he looked ahead and beheld the gosling a prime goose prolific of golden eggs for himself and many others.

'Wash,' he cried to his mate, 'I'm going to buy up wherever I can.'

Larry scratched his head and looked dubious. He felt it was his duty to protect his friend, who had treated him like a brother.

'You've thrown away enough money on that property down in Phillipia, I think.'

'Not I,' laughed Jerry. 'I'm a young man and a strong man. I can work for food and a roof while my money is set like dough to rise over-night. It *will* rise, mate, and I can live well enough and wait for it.'

Larry, who was not of a sanguine nature, not speculative, not long-sighted, shrugged his shoulders only; he knew it was useless to argue, but felt that Jerry was doing a risky thing.

Jerry was not influenced the least by anybody's doubts and fears. He did buy up wherever he could, through Government sales and private individuals. Several allotments he sold again at an increased value, putting the necessary cash in his pocket for fresh investments in taking up country for plantation-grounds. The Land Act of the time offered facilities for this purpose through a regulation by which any person planting a certain acreage of specified plants might secure

the freehold of land at ten shillings per acre—a measure serving to promote the culture of tropical products.

These plantations, like everything he touched, prospered in the course of years, and he found himself a wealthy man. Ultimately he left them, with Washington Larry as manager *pro tem.*, and visited the far interior, where he bought a couple of stations at a low figure, owing to the owners being glad to realize upon them because of losses through drought and disaster. Thus it came to pass that Jerry stood with several irons in a financial fire, and all red-hot since the fire began to blaze so high that its light travelled some distance, and glorified the man who had built it. Herein lies a rough chart of the road he had mapped out to riches, and which he reached so faithfully.

After a long residence in Flindersland, he and Washington went to the south to enjoy life in their own way, for Washington was as Jerry's shadow, and by him in all things treated handsomely. Had he not saved Jerry's life? The broken arm that had saved Jerry's head was the knitting of Larry's fortune too.

Subsequently the two men resided permanently in Phillipia, occupying one of Jerry's

own houses, known as 'Bachelor's Nest,' in Virginia Bay. Goldwin had offices in the city, and a large staff of employés. His stations and plantations—little mints for him—were in trustworthy hands, and Washington Larry was appointed simply to make himself useful when called upon, and received a splendid allowance, upon which he might have supported a wife and two or three olive-branches, and set up a decent home on his own account, had he chosen; but he did not choose.

He was satisfied. His occupation was a sinecure, he had no anxieties, had enough to eat, enough to wear, and clung only to three dear friends: to his benefactor firstly, of course, with the fidelity of a woman—to the man who had lifted him from poverty, and done away with for ever his 'ne'er-do-well' days; to his cat, and to his meerschaum.

But if Larry was grateful to Jerry, Jerry was more than grateful to Larry, and no matter how or in what way he heaped favours upon him, felt that the debt of his life could never be fully repaid; so their lives were intertwined, and a link as bright and indissoluble as that which knit the friendship of the embryo shepherd-king and the reigning king's son united their hearts.

Up to a certain time Washington Larry smoked his pipe in peace and contentment at the office or at home, facing his mate and discussing current topics, perhaps sipping occasionally at the flowing bowl ; his life was very even, more so than his friend's.

Goldwin was more in demand socially, and, while conscious of his social weight, was averse to being lionized, the tendency that way being strong. He was pointed at as the richest man in Phillipia—the modern Midas, turning everything he touched into solid gold.

Invitations from all directions assailed him, and of divers kinds, some of which he was compelled to accept ; but he was not a society man, as Theodore Lockstud had justly observed to his wife, nor was he a man of words.

Lacking eloquence, he spoke as little as possible, but generally spoke to the purpose. He was president of half a dozen institutions, and a liberal subscriber to all.

It may be said that it is an easy thing for a millionaire to be a liberal subscriber, that a river cannot miss a pitcher of water, or the earth a dozen grains of sand : that may be true. He did not miss what he offered, but the offering itself was as a rose highly perfumed, redolent of sweetness, for the essence of gene-

rosity and pure philanthropy centred in his great heart impelled his hand to give for the love of giving and making others happy, and not through the pride of possession or gross ostentation. Let us do him justice. It was not his fault if his scattered pounds created worldly incense; but his gold fell in unseen corners too, from which there emanated a sweeter savour to rise higher than earth and over the heads of men.

From politics he held aloof, and was never so happy as when alone with his mate, smoking, yarning, and dressed in well-worn, easy-fitting clothes, and was never so miserable or fidgety as when, arrayed in evening dress and starched linen, he was bound for an evening out somewhere.

Larry felt sorry for him at these times, and almost wished he was not so sought after, or that he would resist the seeking. But if Goldwin had obeyed his impulse to remain at home, it is impossible to say what might have happened; but what did happen is the main thing, the hinge upon which this story hangs, for one evening in particular he met Isabella Gimp.

A dinner-party was given for him especially, but later on some young people were expected for a dance.

It was when dinner was over and, cigar in mouth—an unpleasant substitute for his homely pipe — he sat with several gentlemen on a trellised-in balcony, where coffee was being served, that she first appeared before him.

He was stationed by a window which commanded a full view of the drawing-room within, and saw her enter there arm-in-arm with a gentleman. Her toilette was severely simple—a dress of some soft cashmere material of dark hue, contrasting with her flaxen coils and fitting her splendid figure as closely as wax, with its bodice cut square and low on the chest, and sleeves short, exposing the shapely, round white arms unadorned.

He pulled his cigar from his lips, held it at arm's length, and shot the smoke from his mouth, which remained open in silent wonder and admiration for a few seconds. He was lost in rapture over so much enticing beauty concentrated in one form, from the golden crown to the tapering toe of the silver-buckled, bronze-kid little shoe.

Suddenly there came an ecstatic muttering:

'By the Lord Harry, what a stunner!'

Some few moments after, having flung his cigar anywhere out of hand, he was in the drawing-room, procuring an introduction.

He stood before her, with his right arm slung behind him across his waist—his usual position when standing—and he found that she would bear a close inspection.

The young man who had led her into the room, and seemed never to have left her side since, was sitting closely by her, and both were rather apart from the rest of the company.

This young man's eyes, dark and piercing, were on the lady's face too; but their expression changed from tenderness to hauteur as the millionaire advanced with the hostess, as the young lady's face perceptibly flushed with apparent pleasure.

'Will you bring a chair over here and sit down?' she said to Jerry, the formality of presentation being over. 'I have heard so much of you, and seem to know you quite well.'

Whereupon the young man, with flashing eyes and a sarcastic mouth, jumped up and said, with stiff politeness and grave bow:

'Mr. Goldwin need not trouble; he can take my place with pleasure.'

Jeremiah Goldwin, engrossed then, gazing after the retreating figure and thinking, 'There goes a courteous, praiseworthy young fellow,' did not see 'the stunner' smile and slightly toss her

head ; and, as the gentleman's back was turned to him, he likewise failed to see the scowl that sat on his countenance. He was grateful to him, and approved of the action of the offered seat as one of respectful attention, and, still looking after the abdicant, he asked, without a glance at the lady :

'Who is that ?'

'A friend of mine—Mr. Lockstud.'

'Lockstud!' repeated Jerry, with a strange eagerness and increased interest—'Lockstud! That's strange!'

'Why strange?' she asked, smiling up at him.

He sat down in Lockstud's chair and began to rub his forehead with his broad fingers as if trying to think or remember something.

'Do you know anything of him, then ?' she asked, seeing that he still pondered.

'I knew some people of the same name years ago, and far from Australia, that's all. Let us talk of something else,' he added abruptly.

Miss Gimp was clever ; she at once concluded that the subject was oppressive, and obeyed his demand for 'something else' immediately. She glided into conversation easily, and laughed and talked, and laughed again, till

her companion began to feel rejuvenated and to wish he was young once more, and an Adonis meet to worship her.

She told him she was staying with Mrs. Calliport, which was quite a piece of pleasing information for him; for Mrs. Calliport was one of his tenants, and almost a neighbour, and he at once expressed some contrition for not having called upon her, since she was an invalid, at the same time making a mental vow to do so as soon as possible.

'I am sure Mrs. Calliport will be delighted to see you at her house,' said the fair Isabella.

'And Miss Gimp?' he asked, getting daring enough to begin a flirtation.

'Certainly,' she replied, with a ripple of mirth which set his old heart beating.

Her apparently simple, confiding nature, her peerless beauty, were arrows which he, though advanced in years, was not tough enough to resist, and he returned to his bachelor's home that night a veritable lion in love.

Mrs. Calliport thought him a considerate, kind-natured old gentleman indeed, because he apologized to her on his first visit for never having called before, and because from that date on he came several times, and even drank

tea with her and Miss Gimp in quite a friendly fashion.

Mrs. Calliport did not praise him altogether beyond his merits in pronouncing him to be kind and thoughtful, although her companion was the primary attraction to her house ; for in truth he was sorry for having missed her acquaintance so long, and with that honest, rough simplicity of his, brightening his words and atoning for manner, he stamped his sympathy for her infirmity as genuine, and all unconsciously won an esteem which her own characteristics excited for herself within him.

So Jerry had a great respect for Mrs. Calliport, while suffering keenly through wild infatuation exercised by the personal charms of her companion.

While Jerry was going through this phase of his existence, Washington Larry still smoked his pipe of peace not two hundred yards away, ignorantly blissful of the matrimonial mine about to be fired under his feet to shatter his general complacency ; but the bliss stood only for a short period. Jerry wore a grizzly beard at this time, until one day he rather startled his mate by coming home clean-shaven.

'Thunder! what's that for?' exclaimed Larry, who did not consider the loss of beard

an improvement, leaving alone that it was a sinking of personal individuality. 'Clean-shaved! What for?'

'Don't approve?' began Jerry, with the least suspicion of a twinkle in his eye as he walked over to a square, unpretentious mirror hanging above a mantleshelf which was adorned with pipes, pouches, and tobacco-jars—as dear to the owners as the choicest *bric-à-brac* to my lady.

After an examination therein, he laughed quietly, and admitted:

'Well, I do look a funny chap.'

'Not like yourself,' growled Larry in reply.

'No use crying over spilt milk,' quoth Goldwin. 'It isn't torn out by the roots; the grass'll grow again.'

And this was all the satisfaction to be had for the present. But when Jerry began to sport his broadcloth every day, and to coax his great hands into kid gloves, and walk out always dressed like a dandy—when Larry found himself left a great deal more alone than usual to read his papers and miscellaneous literature, over which he got considerably mixed, to smoke or sip or yawn in solitude, why, he would have been as dull as a fish not to have felt the rumbling of the mine.

One night when Goldwin had been home

about a quarter of an hour, it being near eleven o'clock, when he, having cast his fine clothes, was happy in his old ones, and sat opposite his mate smoking a well-stained pipe, Larry, sitting as small boys do when converting a chair into a toy-horse, with his long legs crossing the seat, his arms folded on the back, his meerschaum dangling from his fingers unheeded, with its fire dying in the bowl, pushed his head forward, and peering into his friend's face curiously with his ferret eyes, put a question quite unexpectedly:

'Have you slipped your moorings, mate?'

'What does that mean?' Jerry asked, feigning a cloudy perception of the metaphor, and trying to look as unconcerned as Larry's pet cat, Cicero, lying coiled at his master's feet. 'You don't generally sneak round a bush when you've got anything to say. What do you mean?'

Jerry, still smoking, began to help himself to a glass of the beer which was set on the table before him, ready as it always was for their consumption at this hour. He spoke with an assumed carelessness, and though he filled up his glass, he left it untasted, standing till it got flat, while he listened to what his mate had to say:

'It just means this: I want to know the whole truth. I've got eyes in my head, but you're your own master, and it ain't for me to interfere; but all the same, it ain't too late, maybe, for me to give you a bit of advice, just because I can't stand by quietly and see you in danger without giving a hand.'

'It wouldn't be the first time, old boy, that you had given me the hand,' said Jerry very gently, with his eyes turned upon that arm of Larry's which had been splintered in his service.

'Pshaw!' cried Larry; 'drop that! You've been over-grateful for that business, and I'd have done the same for any feller; but I tell you what I wouldn't do for every feller: I wouldn't trust him like I trust you, and I wouldn't expect to have his trust as I do expect to have yours, after all these years; because it's brothers we are, you and me, and not a bit else; and I say you're not trusting me.'

There followed a pause, Jerry smoking, his beer spoiling, getting headless, and Larry still leaning on his arms over the chair-back, peering into his companion's face, and letting his pipe go out, all his thought being for his friend.

'You're right, Wash,' Goldwin asserted at length. 'You're right. I've got something to

tell you, and I might have let it out before, but didn't know exactly how you'd take to it.'

'Is it as bad as that?'

'Bad! Confound you! what are you talking about? It is GOOD—good for me and good for you. It won't come between us a bit; she is certain to like you.'

Jerry puffed away, doing his best to be calm and cool, but succeeding in neither; for he was really nervous about wounding his friend with a reference to their future changed relations. He raised his voice as he hurled his 'Confound you!' but it sank to gentleness again with the succeeding sentences.

'Ah!' sighed Larry; 'it IS a woman, then—I am right.'

'Yes, Wash, old fellow, it is a woman. I'm going to be married. Wish us joy.'

There came no answer for some little time. Larry evinced no surprise. Congratulations stuck in his throat. Maintaining his inelegant position for a few seconds only, he turned and sat on the chair properly. He put his pipe in his mouth to puff mechanically, forgetting it was not alight; his lean hands moved spasmodically, caressing the stem; then he moved them from that to the cat, stooping to stroke its head; all the while his back was turned upon

Jerry. Cicero, roused by the touch, stretched himself, yawned, arched his back, and lastly rubbed a cold nose against the fondling hand.

Larry's ferret eyes watered, his features contracted, his throat swelled—not because of the cat's responding caress and token of affection, but because of his friend. He seemed to see him slipping gradually further and further away, the slave of an attraction—slipping to his own ruin. He had nursed a hope that Jerry's age would protect him from matrimonial ventures, would be as an armour against woman's wiles and enticing smiles, and fondly believed that his own companionship and sure friendship would have sufficed to the end of his days; and now a woman had come between them, and the armour was no armour at all.

Goldwin eyed him askance, and then said rather reproachfully:

'You might wish me joy.'

Larry turned quickly; his eyes were glistening.

'Don't I wish you joy? Thunder! I wish it you every hour of the day. You've been a good friend to me, and I ought to wish it. I've been expecting this ever since you took to wearing your fine feathers every day, ever since you lost your beard; but when it comes from

your own mouth, you see, it strikes one a bit of a heap, and I've got to get used to it, that's all.' He turned again and bent over his cat with a fondling hand, before he added, 'I knew there was a woman at the bottom of it.'

'An angel,' corrected Jerry.

'Angel or devil as it suits them,' mumbled Larry, not daring to speak out; then aloud: 'It ain't likely that a man of your position could escape being collared by one of 'em—one of your angels—sooner or later, though you're no chicken; but I did think you would have dodged and slipped the noose. Now you're caught at last. No offence, mate, but I hope your angel is as fond of you as she might be of your tin, and will make you happier than we have been together all these years.' He paused, cleared his throat, and before his mate could answer he went on with emphatic earnestness, 'By thunder, again, I say, I wish you joy!' Then his right hand was stretched across the table. 'Put it there, mate, put it there!'

Jerry did 'put it there.' For a second or so they gripped hands in silence, and Jerry resumed his former position much relieved because the breaking of the ice to his friend was well over. Presently he began, half in apology:

'Wash, don't you know, it is a sort of duty for a man like me to marry, and I've been wary of widows and old maids; but here, when a beautiful young creature may be mine for the asking, now tell the truth, wouldn't I be a dolt not to make her Mrs. Goldwin? Wait till you see her. You'll be falling in love with her yourself, and be plotting how to get me out of the road'—this with a chuckle. 'Now light your pipe, and we'll drink our beer in the usual way; and don't look as if I had invited you to my funeral and was going to hang myself.'

'She might be as beautiful as a—a columbine,' said Larry, taxing his memory for a comparison, and not knowing any female beauty to reach as high as this standard offered at the pantomime. It may be observed that the female portion of humanity ranked very low in Washington Larry's estimation. 'She might be as beautiful as a columbine, and I'd still be love-proof. I haven't got a heart, perhaps, or if I had it was a woman as soured it for all her kind; but never mind that. You've got one sound and warm enough, and, besides, you're as rich—as rich as Methuselah.'

Jerry shot a quiet glance at his friend, wondering if this latter comparison was meant for a sly joke at his expense—a quiet hit at the

ancient bridegroom; but no, Larry had no sense of humour, and had never made a joke in his life. His reading was varied and his memory hazy, which led to some comical errors on his part sometimes.

'When is it to be?' he asked, as he struck a match on the sole of his boot and relit his pipe.

'This day week—St. Patrick's—and you're to be best man.'

'Me?'

'Yes. Who but you has a right to that place?'

'Won't another feller do?'—this pleadingly.

He did not want to stand by and see his old friend given up to the sacrifice—the angel.

'No,' decisively. 'I must have my way in this. You shall see there's some excuse for me. Your heart will come back to you, and, by the Lord Harry! it would beat, and jump, and swell if you had her snowy arms about your neck, her wonderful hair touching your cheek, her lips at yours. I fell right away in love with her at first sight, old bloke as I am; but old or not I'm lucky—in love as with money.'

A pained look came into the other man's eyes—a compassionate, sorrowful tenderness was there as he turned them on the infatuated bridegroom-elect. It was as if he were listen-

ing to the delirious ravings of a man struggling with fever. He made no allusion to it, but said :

'And you'll come back here to live with her, I suppose ?'

The accent of resignation in these words was not lost upon Jerry, who replied immediately, with his characteristic generosity forcing itself from heart to lips :

'Oh no, old boy ; this is *your* nest now and always. Nothing shall be changed. I will take her to the great house in Virginia Bay—Goolgun. She shall live like a princess ; it is her right.'

Larry here made a gulp indicative of emotion before he could reply clearly :

'Jerry, you're a brick ; you make me your debtor over and over again.'

'Bosh ! don't talk to me about debt ; I shall never be out of yours ; only look less dismal, and be my best man, and come and see us sometimes as if we were sister and brother to you, and be as happy as we shall be.'

'I'll get used to it, I suppose, and if I don't see you miserable, *I* won't be there ! But I say, Jerry'—here he leaned towards him, and lowered his voice—'will you tell her about the other affair ?'

'No,' answered Jerry, almost with a snap; 'that's dead and buried. Where's the use?'

Larry look pleased. Here was something between them solely—the privilege of a secret which not even the 'angel' was to share with them.

'There's only one besides you who really knows everything about me; one or two know a few things, but not everything, eh, old man?'

'And that one and me will stick to you through thick and thin.'

'Don't I know that?'

When Larry was endeavouring to sleep that night his slumber was disturbed at the outset with doubts and fears concerning the future of his friend. He mentally said, 'No woman will ever love him as I do—as I must. He deserves the angel, but angels don't marry old men like him; only women do, for the life of the "princess." And what a brick he is! so good, so generous! Who's the angel he's going to make a princess of? I never asked. Well, I'll see her sooner than I want to. I'll go to the wedding; oh yes, I'll go and stand by the good old chap, and then afterwards, why, "Farewell to all my greatness," as Don Juan says somewhere. Washington Larry, you're nowhere; your day is done. But I'll stick, I say, through

thick and thin to the best feller living, I will.' Gradually his mind refused to conceive clearly; his thoughts ran riot; his eyes closed, and at last he slept, dreaming that the bride had thrown her arms about his neck and was slowly throttling him.

CHAPTER V.

THE MILLIONAIRE'S WIFE AND THE MILLIONAIRE'S FRIEND.

On the day after Mr. and Mrs. Goldwin's return to Phillipia, it being Sunday, Washington Larry, as the privileged friend of the bridegroom, not waiting for the general reception, called upon him and his bride at Goolgun.

He, like Priscilla Lockstud, was ready to sacrifice his own especial feeling of repulsion on the altar of love, for he had likewise been repelled by the bride.

He might have been a mangy mongrel sniffing at his master's heels for the aversion displayed on her wedding-day.

She had glanced at him, and in that glance of arrogant indifference and cutting contempt had as decisively conveyed her estimation of the 'best man' as if she had deliberately hissed in his face, or lifted a dainty satin-shod foot to

vulgarly kick him for the worst she had ever seen. He was compelled to acknowledge that she was a queen of beauty, and could better sympathize with his infatuated mate, who had lost himself in the glare of her magnificence.

And now she was about to become the wife of that mate, and it behoved him to submit to her humour for the present, while his loyalty to the bridegroom forced him to hide the pain she had inflicted.

Nevertheless, he made no attempt to address her directly or indirectly, before or after the ceremony, which had been a private one ; not followed by any junketing, but only a modest sipping of wines and disposal of wedding-cake in the saloon of the yacht chartered by Goldwin for his honeymoon tour, where the bridal party gathered to wish him and his bride a temporary farewell.

He had taken care to ensure as much privacy as possible, to avoid after-dinner speeches and wholesale flatteries, to be washed down with champagne, which they resembled in their sparkling effervescence, so temporary, in losing relish with over-much airing.

His beautiful Belle, who desired nothing better than a grand wedding with its accom-

paniments of wealth—a string of coaches, ribboned whips, flowers, wedding presents, the rustling of silks, satins and velvets, glare, publicity—did not oppose his wishes, because she understood that he was a man not to be opposed; and it was her policy to give way with a graciousness sweet enough to be worthy of Priscilla Lockstud.

Larry felt some compunction, when he first beheld the bride in all her splendour, for not having presented himself more in keeping with the surroundings. He had consented to be Jerry's 'best man,' but when the day of trial arrived there was so much mourning in his heart that it perforce was worn 'on his sleeve,' was declared in his attire—his black cotton gloves—and every feature of his face.

After the departure of the yacht, and in his solitude, he had ample time for reflection, and he determined to make amends for shortcomings. Pondering on the evident displeasure of the bride, it did occur to him that his manifestation of sorrow was somewhat *mal apropos* for the occasion, and that there was perhaps some excuse for her treatment of him. Accordingly, he quite expected, when he made his obeisance in her own drawing-room in a brand-new broad-striped, large-patterned suit,

fashionably cut, with his shining boots, gloved hands, and a tall chimney-pot hat, held in his left hand, as he extended his right, cased in canary-coloured kid, and exclaimed heartily 'How do you do? Welcome to Goolgun, and may you be happy!' that some kindly words and looks would have been elicited; but nothing of the kind happened. Mrs. Goldwin merely vouchsafed a coldly polite 'Thank you' and a formal bow; she did not even seem to see his hand or his clothes, or anything but the bracelet on her wrist—a broad band of gold, with a diamond snake curved and nestling in it—which she was twisting and admiring.

He drew back his hand and fell to stroking his beard with it, while his back stiffened, and his face underwent a variety of expressions under this second sting. Humiliation made it wince, indignation made it angry, pity for the man who had undoubtedly caught a tartar made it sorrowful. It was more than he could bear without flinching of any sort, even although Jerry's eyes were on him. The fact of a woman, no matter how beautiful, having the power to torment him was a stab in itself, and from the stab there issued black blood.

Now, Jeremiah Goldwin was an infatuated husband, but infatuation could not blind him

where his friend was concerned. It was perhaps the first time that his wife's lack of perfection was revealed, Larry's own face being the mirror which reflected her grace of feature and manner a little awry to him. He could so well interpret its workings from long association, that he quite understood it now, and though the annoyance of it was heating his blood, he did the wisest thing to be done under the circumstances by feigning an ignorance of the proceeding, and before Larry could find words to cover his confusion — for he was struggling for speech that instant—Jerry linked his arm through his friend's, and said, as if the proposition were not a sudden inspiration :

'Come out on the veranda, Wash, and see our view.'

And Wash went with him gratefully, deceiving himself that he was practising deception, and mopping his head and face violently with a scarlet pocket-handkerchief as he vented his temper in a good round oath at the 'darned hot morning,' 'the smart trot he had been at,' while the crisp cold air of a July day played freely on the veranda, and made havoc with his beard in wanton ridicule of these statements. He did his utmost to look quite unconcerned,

as if it were the most natural thing in the world to expect that the wife of his one loving friend should treat him as a stranger—should refuse to see his hand.

Mrs. Goldwin was left to twirl her bracelet, or amuse herself in divers ways, while her husband and his mate took their seats on the veranda. Jerry made no reference to the temperature of the day, but both men felt their own abnormally high, and neither seemed to appreciate the glories of the Phillipia harbour. They talked for a little while, and subsequently left the house for a walk together.

Not one word was said in reference to Mrs. Goldwin on either side, though she sat like an imp on each man's mind to make their converse erratic in their efforts to smother the memory of her insolence. Goldwin had left her without any clue to his movements, and Wash had omitted to make a ceremonious departure, at which her husband forgot to take offence.

'Now, look here, old fellow,' he said at parting, 'you're to dine with us every Sunday after this. I don't ask you to-day, because we're not quite settled yet; but, remember, that's the rule in future.'

He spoke in that tone which Wash understood as defying resistance, and as if nothing

had happened to disturb his equanimity. He succeeded perfectly in convincing Larry that he was, and ever would be, hopelessly blind to his lovely Delilah.

How should Larry know that Goldwin meant to go home and actually lecture her? Unwilling to betray by sign or word the aggravation he was enduring through the woman his friend had taken to wife, he grunted something in answer to the invitation, which was neither acceptance nor refusal, and went his way towards his solitary nest.

Arriving there, he began to tug at his yellow gloves—bought especially for the visit—to split them at the thumbs as he tore them off impatiently, to roll them into a ball, and next send them sure and swift into the fire.

'That's where she ought to be pitched,' he mumbled in his beard, 'for a witch as she is!'

He pulled his chair before the grate and watched the little bundle of kid smoulder and crinkle and burn, and then he laughed for the first time that day — a choking, broken, hysterical laugh, as he tried to picture her yellow hair frizzling in the blaze; but Jerry's burly figure came between him and the fire, and the laugh was swallowed like a gulp, and left him sad and pitying again.

'Poor old Jerry!' he cried; 'he's been and gone and done it; he's caught a tartar, and I've got to stand by and see it and hold my tongue, because I know if I said a word agen her it would set him agen me; and how should I be paying him back for all he's done for a fossil like me?'

Then a fitful flicker of passion cried out in spasmodic soliloquy:

'Serves you right for a darned fool! What did you want to run there in such a hurry for? Jezebel! to refuse an honest man's hand! I'll be quits. I'll keep my eye on her for Jerry's sake. *She* married the old boy for love! Bah! If she did, would she snub *me?*'

He glared at the fire from his sunken sockets, and shook his fist at what remained of part of the perished 'war-paint and feathers' donned in her honour.

'Catch me wearing them things agen for her, unless at her funeral!'

He spoke aloud here, and his voice awakened his dumb friend, whose existence he had momentarily forgotten. Cicero bounded across the room from a cosy corner, where he had been coiled in slumber, and began to rub himself against his master's legs.

'Ah, Cicero, there you are! I was for-

getting I had you,' he exclaimed. 'You are worth half a dozen yaller-haired witches, you are!'

Cicero, accustomed to license, leaped on Larry's knees to be fondled and stroked, and to acknowledge his appreciation by a loud and strong purring.

'Poor old puss! poor old Cicero! what's all that row about, eh? No cold looks, no hard words, from you. Don't you pity me?—pity Jerry? Purr, purr away. I know that's what it means. Shall we have a smoke, Cicero, and forget her? I declare you're a comfort.'

He held the creature to his bosom within his lean, long, encircling arms. He rubbed his cheeks against the soft fur, and felt soothed with this strange companionship. Presently the soothing process was in stronger force under the benign influence of tobacco. He filled the room with fumes, and literally smoked the image of the 'yaller-haired witch' out of it—out of his mind for a time. If he could have been in hiding at that moment—concealed in Mrs. Goldwin's boudoir—the wound to his vanity would have found a salve, for Jerry was as busy as he could be taking up the cudgels for his outraged mate.

Having returned to Goolgun, he found his

lady alone, reading a novel, and reclining on a silken couch in a perfect nest of downy cushions in her boudoir, which represented her own luxurious tastes, and declared opulence in every nook.

There were rose silk curtains on its windows, a dark, rich grounded crimson velvet pile carpet on its floor, a dainty suite of rose plush with ebony and pearl inlaid frames, unique tables here and there, bearing vases of flowers and albums, showily bound books, and charming knick-knacks. There were elegant pictures on its gold and cream papered walls, novel brackets holding statuary in marble and bronze, a collection of Oriental and Japanese art scattered in pleasing confusion, and the whole apartment was filled with a soft pinky light, tinting its fair occupant as she reposed there like an Indian princess for fantastic luxury.

She did not close her book as Jerry entered, or make any sign that she heard him when his heavy footstep creaked at the threshold. She knew something of that episode in her husband's early life when Washington Larry had defended him with his own body; she knew something of the broken forearm which had saved his otherwise doomed head; but it did not occur to her that it was necessary for her

to remember it, or that Jerry would dare to resent her coldness towards an individual with whom she had nothing in common ; nor did she think it incumbent upon her to maintain an intimacy with all Mr. Goldwin's friends or associates, considering them as chaff, which she meant to sift from the social grain meet for her own fastidious acceptance. He had entered a new life with her, and it was only right and proper for him to leave his old life and plebeian habits outside the Goolgun gates if she was to succeed in gathering within her own domain the *élite* of Phillipia. Would they not be scared away, ousted, if allowed to once suffer contamination from contact with non-cultured, ill-dressed, rough-mannered creatures, such as this friend of her husband's ? Moreover, had he not offended her on her wedding-day with his mute-like appearance, his lugubrious countenance, and added to his offence by his unceremonious visit that day, and—as she deemed it -familiar advance ?

She had married for position, and how was she to maintain it if her coterie was to be marred with a mixture of the Washington Larry kind ? She exacted obedience and constant attention from her husband ; he had given both ungrudgingly hitherto. But when he left

the house without a word of apology for his absence prefacing the action, left without even a 'good-bye,' and with that horrid man—preferring his society to hers ; a gorilla-like fellow, she called him—she also felt her temper rise, and was piqued. So Goldwin found her.

He walked up to her couch and drew a chair close by ; then, with his eyes set on the beautiful, disdainful profile, he began :

'You are mightily interested in that trash.'

Mrs. Goldwin turned to him suddenly, as if his words alone had made known his presence.

'Is that you? I thought you were not coming home for some time longer—that you were lost in the congenial companionship of Mr. Larry.'

'Some people are interested in trash like that,' he said with ire smothered, and muffling his words as they escaped through set teeth and sullen jaws, and he pointed with a forefinger at the book in her hand. 'Trash!' he repeated, 'and lies from beginning to end. And some people are interested in their friends, which are truth every inch of 'em. You understand?'

'I'm afraid I do not,' she answered, with a provoking smile turned upon the book, while she trifled with its pages, running them off

from under her thumb. 'You must be very unintelligible, or I must be very dull; which is it?'

'Maybe it is both,' he replied, getting very red and heated as he watched her; he was holding a very tight curb on that violent temper over which he did not always have control. He did not want her to see him in his worst lights, and if his passion were once allowed to come to the surface there was no knowing how he might degrade himself in her eyes. All the same, it was breaking through his words like the smoke that heralds the eruption. 'Maybe I should have reminded you of that skirmish with the blacks when I was nearly knocked into kingdom come; maybe you have forgotten that it was Mr. Larry who held me back and got an arm cracked for his trouble; maybe you have forgotten that until now he, amongst the whole kit of those who know me and run after me, is the only one who would stick to me if I hadn't a penny to-morrow. He is one of the few loyal friends I have in the world. I don't want to quarrel with you, my girl, but you have stirred the blood up in me, and it is just as well for you to know now and always that I will not allow anybody—not even *you*, my wife, the

woman I love and honour, and who has sworn to love and honour me—to treat that friend with disrespect; for if you do, you will perjure your vow to me, and I say he *shall* be treated by my wife with the respect which is his due.'

His voice trembled with the last sentences, so quietly yet forcibly spoken, and then he rose from his chair to walk off to a window and turn his back on his wife, while he desperately struggled to keep the full strength of his wrath at bay.

The rosy curtains enveloped him with a soft reflection as they fell in thick folds, through which the golden sunlight partly penetrated—the sunlight which, flooding generously the city, glittered on the rippling waters of the harbour, almost opposite, and played on the foam-crested, silvery white, leaping waves, dashing for ever at the rugged feet of two towering cliffs miles ahead, gigantic portals of a lovely haven.

Mrs. Goldwin's eyes followed him to the window; she was totally unprepared for this championship; it set her thinking of possibilities not acceptable. She was almost as white as the foam at the rocks, and knew that, like the foam, she would be beating herself against stone in thwarting his wishes. She was not grateful to Washington Larry, though through

him a man had been spared who was to endow her with all she held dear in the universe – wealth and luxury ; but there was something in Jerry's manner which inverted at once her prescribed *rôle* of the dictatorial woman ; the docile wife arose in her stead.

Goldwin was presently agreeably surprised as he still stood at the window, his arm slung behind him, across his waist, to feel the touch of five soft fingers nestling against his open palm, to hear a voice just at his shoulder, no longer scornful or rebellious, but tinged with repentance.

'Don't be angry with me, Jeffrey, because I am jealous of the hours you give to others,' it said. 'I am sorry to have vexed you. I will try to like your friend ; I am grateful to him. Won't you speak to me?'

Jerry swerved round with a wonderfully quick reversal of position and disposition towards his wife, and he caught her to his broad strong breast with an oath which he could not repress, and which was but an ebullition of delight, as he exclaimed :

'That's my own true lass, my glorious Belle! You raised the devil in me, but you've cowed him again.'

Mrs. Goldwin had observed rather an alarm-

ing smoke, and, like the fisherman and the genii, after tampering with and opening the vessel from which it issued, she succeeded by strategy in imprisoning it in its old quarters again, and so became master of the situation.

When her husband released her from his arms, she rearranged her dress, which had slightly suffered, and said smilingly :

'And now we are friends once more, I hope.'

'Friends—by the Lord Harry, that we are! Only treat him as he deserves, and we'll never fall out.'

'Love me, love my dog,' said Mrs. Goldwin, and then she laughed outright.

She had made an excellent move in her own game ; she knew that he would be more her slave than ever now, and she fully intended to make him fulfil the services she required of him.

That same night she wrote and posted the letter which Theodore Lockstud had received at the bank and burned at his own fireside.

Washington Larry was somewhat confused and conscience-stricken one afternoon, the same week of his visit to Goolgun, when, returning from the city, he took a short-cut through City Park towards the busy hilly street leading to his home.

Once a week a band of skilful musicians dis-

coursed sweet music in this park, and this was band-day. But the band had departed, with the crowd following suit, and only a few stragglers remained, of whom he took no notice; but when he came within about fifteen yards of a chair, in an oblique direction, he spied, sitting thereon, a lady and gentleman certainly offering especial attractions for him. They were conversing with much earnestness, as evinced by sundry nods and gestures from both; and although he could not distinguish the features of either clearly, he yet could recognise one in particular. There was no mistaking the slender, elegant form of the lady so wonderfully decked, or the pale golden hair —of which he had never seen the like—as it pushed its way through a crownless bonnet in luxurious rolls and twists. The gentleman was a stranger to him, and only demanded his notice because of the lady at his side. He was a young man, with a long straight back, square shoulders, and of soldierly bearing; he could see that much.

'I'd know her yaller hair anywhere,' he muttered to himself; 'but who the deuce is the feller? Thunder! I'll just try and find out.' Saying which he altered his course, so as to pass the chair and obtain a front view.

He sauntered by them, shooting a side glance, which was almost a squint, and wishing them to think themselves unobserved. He did not want to have to salute the lady who had insulted him; but it was his duty, he said, to keep an eye on her for Jerry's sake.

'Good-afternoon, Mr. Larry.' Before he had time to recover his breath, Mrs. Goldwin stood before him without her companion. She had followed him, and thus arrested his footsteps—his very thoughts. Her hand was outstretched; her lips were smiling; her eyes were flashing with mischief; and Larry stood dumb, even while he took her hand and raised his hat. 'I thought I was right,' she began, with rapid accents, 'and ventured to follow you and see. I'm so glad to have met you, for now, as your road is also mine, you can escort me to the carriage which awaits me, and I can drive you home. Quite mutual advantages, unless you prefer walking.' He looked down sheepishly at his ungloved hands and his dusty boots, and she, not giving him time to frame a reply, rattled on in artfully artless fashion: 'Oh! never mind your dress; old friends should not stand upon ceremony, and you are such an old friend of Jeffrey's you must be mine, too. Come on.'

'Thank you!' faltered Larry at last, unable to refuse, and not wishing to do so if he could, but not quite sure whether he was awake or dreaming; 'but where is the gentleman?' He looked about him then, as he put the question, to the right and to the left. 'It wasn't Jerry,' he added.

'You did see me, then,' she said quickly, 'and would have passed me by.'

'Thunder, she's tripped me up!' mentally ejaculated Washington, and then, mustering courage, he smiled grimly as he answered, 'I thought you didn't want me to see you, Mrs. Goldwin, or yourself to see me.'

'You are mistaken; I wish to see you always, Mr. Larry, especially at Goolgun. Now escort me, if you please, to the carriage.'

'But the gentleman?'

Again he looked right and left, with curiosity still alive.

'Oh! he has gone another road. That was a friend of mine; I have heaps of friends, old and new, and have met so many this afternoon.'

He was not quite satisfied; but she lapsing into silence, as if the fountain of her quick spurt of talk had suddenly dried up, he set to work at his own poor spring of converse as they

walked along together to meet the carriage, in strange contrast—the would-be aristocrat and the honest democrat. A poor spring, but refreshing to him, since he poured forth to his heart's content a gush of thanksgiving, of eulogy, of affection, dedicated to her husband, which should have interested her, but did not.

He told her of the old times—of Jerry's exploits, of Jerry's cleverness, of Jerry's goodness to himself; and while he thought he was contributing to her pleasure and repaying to the best of his ability her graciousness vouchsafed that day to him, she was listening with an effort; and in his desire to please, and his satisfaction with the attempt, he did not notice her random replies, her 'Yes' for a 'No,' and *vice-versâ*, or the mere interpolation of a monosyllable.

When they reached the carriage, after a walk of quite seven or eight minutes, the footman stared as he held the door open, and Washington Larry—shabby, old-fashioned, dusty, ungloved, and grim—handed his mistress in, and next followed at her repeated invitation to take the seat next to her.

In a few seconds the imposing equipage which had dashed up to Mrs. Calliport's door,

and given a first glimpse of Mrs. Goldwin to Mrs. Lockstud, was rolling through the busy, steep street leading to Virginia Bay, with the millionaire's wife and the millionaire's friend seated side by side, apparently *tête-à-tête*.

That night Larry sat at his fireside, his cat in his lap, his meerschaum in his mouth, and with his thoughts somewhat troubled. He was too wary a bird to be fascinated by a snake, and yet something of this kind had happened to him. Mrs. Goldwin had drawn him to her with the sure swiftness of the magnet irresistibly attracting the needle; but, the magnet once removed, the needle fell back to its wonted place unaffected. Though his self-love was, to a certain extent, appeased by her altered action towards him that day, she had not wholly healed the stabs previously given, nor had she eradicated the seeds of suspicion which her too ready acceptance of Goldwin's wooing had implanted in his mind.

'She was as sweet to-day as she was sour on Sunday,' he told himself, and naturally he wondered why.

Shaking his head gravely, as if to knock a solution of the enigma out of it — which he failed to do—a doubt of her sincerity compelled him

to adhere to his original intention of 'keeping an eye on her.' Yet, with a sluggish kind of gratitude for smiles bestowed on him, he refrained from anathematizing 'yaller-haired witches.'

CHAPTER VI.

WATCH-DOGS.

Mrs. Goldwin did not intend to exert herself so much to please Priscilla Lockstud, because it was a struggle even to tolerate her presence. She had found it quite a task to speak to her and act courteously towards her the first day they met; that she had done so was from mere force of will. There was no need here for Jesuitism, as there had been with her husband's friend. She was the polite hostess and no more.

Priscilla, who was not a woman of penetration by any means, was still aware by some intuition that she and Mrs. Goldwin were not, and never would be, congenial souls. In her deficiency of self-esteem, she was abashed and nervous in the presence of the haughty Isabella.

She felt at a disadvantage, and lost what little self-possession she had. Who cares to

remain in that artificial, garish, searching light, which misrepresents the complexion or exposes every personal flaw? Something of this aversion and shrinking may express the discomfiture which she experienced, but could not analyze. When she sat in the Goolgun drawing-room for the first time, her heart sank at the thought of an intimacy with Mrs. Goldwin. She trembled like a dove with an eagle hovering dangerously near. So Washington Larry was not alone in the troublous reflections excited by the millionaire's wife.

Priscilla, having hinted to her husband, on their way home from Goolgun, her dislike to Mrs. Goldwin without arousing his displeasure, because he did not hear her, owing to temporary abstraction of which she was not aware, ventured later on to give a full and free opinion, which was met with a stern antagonism that surprised her painfully, and determined her to make no further reference, good or bad, to the subject.

Certainly her honeymoon had departed, and she, so sensitive to the loss, wore sackcloth and ashes for it; but wore them in silent, patient suffering.

Theo seemed to be drifting from her, while she was powerless to hold him back; for since that miserable visit to Goolgun he was fre-

quently from home, leaving her to her own devices or amusements. One night he came home, however, in a merry mood. Whistling as he entered the house, and flinging back the little parlour door noisily, he strode into the room like one triumphant; there was elation in his eyes, in his attitude, in his whole expression.

Priscilla, half asleep with weariness—for it was late—had all her drowsiness scared away by what he had to tell, with a flourish of his hand in the air, and perhaps a pardonable, if a wild, enthusiasm. He had done with the bank for ever, he hoped, as he was appointed manager for Jeremiah Goldwin, who was a 'prince,' 'a liberal old fellow,' etc., etc., who, having hitherto managed for himself, had now given up the management to him for a handsome remuneration of £1,000 a year.

Priscilla hailed these tidings with a very weak attempt to respond to his excitement. She was not hungering for money, but for the one-time lover-like husband; and if they pleased her at all, it was because she was eager to look upon his brightened prospects as a possible means of his redemption from cynical humours and capricious moods, which had presented themselves too often to her of late.

'How did it come about?' she asked very naturally, in her utter ignorance of his sayings and doings out-of-doors.

He laughed.

'Oh, with a fairy wand.'

'A fairy wand,' she repeated, like a child half credulous.

'Never mind,' he said, with a show of impatience at her want of intelligence, but arousing her wit with his next words. 'All you have got to do is to put prejudice away in reference to Mrs. Goldwin, and be civil to her.'

'Is *she* the fairy, Theo?' she asked, with less calmness than she had hitherto displayed.

He gnawed at his moustache, and vouchsafed an affirmative with a mere nod of his head, without looking at her.

He knew that this supplementary information would be less pleasing—would, in fact, take the gilt off the gingerbread for her; but what did that matter to him? He was lifted from the bank, with its paltry salary, to be the recipient of £1,000 a year, and in his greed for wealth he was ready to lick the hand that bestowed it—ready to forget that the same hand had dealt him a blow which a man seldom or never forgives. But Lockstud was not a hero, and

never had been, excepting in the sight of the girl who had resigned herself to him for better or for worse — who had elevated him to a pedestal which even now was beginning to totter before her eyes, threatening to throw him to earth.

When no response to his nod came, he spoke.

'You have made up your mind not to like Mrs. Goldwin. Well, I do like her, and I am grateful. She can make him do anything she likes, and for the sake of an old friendship for me she has turned his attention in my direction; and as she is the primary cause of our good fortune, you ought to be grateful too. If you want to get on in the world, you must put sentiment aside and be practical, or get under everybody's feet to be trampled on.'

Jeremiah Goldwin was more than satisfied with his manager. He believed him to be not only shrewd and energetic like himself, but experienced as a business man, with the advantages of a superior education, and with the additional qualities of fluency in speech, courtesy of manner, and admirable tact.

Goldwin, as a married man, and under his wife's influence, retired from the labours of his office; it left him more time to devote to his

lady and to his multifarious duties as a useful citizen. He was undergoing a subtle change unconsciously. Mrs. Goldwin did her breaking in very gently, very deftly. He was her slave and adorer; he loved to clothe her in rich apparel and shining gems; he felt proud to walk into any drawing-room or ball-room with her arm drawn through his. He was as anxious now to go out and exhibit his treasure as any young mother with a first baby in her arms; for this feeling of pride was new to him, a delight never experienced before, and its repetition was an exquisite sensation, the more ardent, perhaps, because of his years, which he delighted to think had not interfered with him as a claimant for the possession coveted by, but denied to, others.

Goolgun was the house of houses in their world of gaiety, entertainment and hospitality. To be in Mrs. Goldwin's set was, to many of the socially ambitious of Phillipia's damsels, debutants and questionably aged ladies still on the matrimonial hunting-grounds, to dames and granddames, to old and young, the summum bonum of social advantage offered in Phillipia, short of Government House. Mrs. Goldwin ought to have been one of the happiest women in existence; most people

thought she was, and in not a few did she excite covetousness.

For the first twelve or eighteen months she was a queen in her own little kingdom, and Jerry was only consort or the man behind the organ at the bellows, to set the harmony of her life afloat; and he was quite satisfied, providing she continued to show him tenderness and consideration of his whims, which she did very cleverly, in sweet imitation of nature, to throw a veil before his eyes

Upon one occasion he remarked to Larry, who, since that drive with his wife from the City Park steps to Virginia Bay, had become a frequent, unceremonious and presumably welcome visitor to Goolgun:

'Now, look here, old boy, the man who won't marry stands in his own light. There's only one thing that keeps me from regretting the waste of years spent in just turning money hand over fist, and that is, because I've got it to give her, after all. My biggest haul never made me feel as I do now when she smiles at me—when I kiss her beautiful face. A fellow who spends his life hauling in and hoarding up, without a wife to help him to spend and enjoy, fools himself.'

Larry's reply was characteristic, if irrelevant:

'Ay, ay, mate. Handsome is as handsome does.'

The faithful Larry, who had many opportunities of quietly taking note of Mrs. Goldwin's conduct in Jerry's absence, was still harassed with doubts respecting her love of her lord and master.

He went in and came out of Goolgun *ad libitum* as an inmate of the house; he sat quietly in any corner, unobtrusive, often unobserved, but always with his eyes in active service. This peculiarity of his led him to take note of trifles which escaped others, and prevented him from divesting his mind of misgivings concerning his hostess, who, having given him *carte blanche* to come and go as he pleased, did not think it worth while to test his conversational ability again to any extent; so she seldom entered into converse with him, considering she was doing her duty well in admitting him as a member of the household. In this she was false to her own tact, and sharpened Larry's observation. He treated her respectfully, but was not insensible to her indifference, and was proof against her charms, at which he snapped his fingers.

'They ain't worth a cent if she doesn't care for Jerry,' he thought.

Hence his remark, which had its bearing on his own meditations, and so little in connection with Goldwin's eulogy on married life.

Mrs. Goldwin, with her blooming beauty, brilliant attire, and bright flow of speech, was naturally courted and flattered, especially by gentlemen.

She always had half a dozen or more around her, at home or elsewhere.

Washington Larry, sitting, as already described, perhaps ostensibly reading or looking through a volume of engravings, seldom speaking, unless addressed—he might have been a pet hound asleep on the hearth, for the slight notice he attracted—heard a vast amount of small-talk and some clever nonsense and repartee, which he could not always understand in its sense of fun.

More often than not—when a crowd was gathered especially—the manager, Theodore Lockstud, was present, sometimes with his wife—frequently without. Washington knew now that this manager was the square-shouldered, soldierly-looking man whom he had seen for the first time at City Park in earnest conversation with Mrs. Goldwin; and herein lay a second propeller to his observation—he thoroughly hated the manager.

Lockstud looked upon his employer's mate as an oddity, and sometimes an encumbrance at the office. He had asked him upon one occasion, when there was a stress of writing to be done, to help in some clerical work. Larry had to refuse because, as he said, 'he had no fist for writing.' Whereupon Lockstud, with his cynicism to the fore, congratulated the office for having obtained the highly invaluable services of Mr. Washington Larry, who was not in receipt of the remuneration deserved.

Larry understood the irony, and gave back a retort. It was not his fault that he had so little to do. He had been industrious enough at manual work in the old hard-working days, and Jerry wished him to lead an easy life now ; so what could he do, since he was no penman, no book-keeper, but superintend occasionally shipping matters, or the arrival and discharge of cargo ?

The words rankled within him, and Lockstud made a dangerous enemy. It irritated him to see this favoured manager hovering about Mrs. Goldwin ; he was jealous of his reputation with her husband.

Larry was not one to suffer reproach unavenged, not one to turn a second cheek to the smiter. He had as many good points as most

men—a conscience that pricked him when he erred, a heart that for gratitude was only next to Jerry's, and a rough honesty of word and action, against which anything like falsity and arrogance grated enough to set his teeth on an edge.

Lockstud had set his teeth on an edge, and to relieve himself of the sensation he longed to bite, and so prepared for a spring when he saw his chance.

There was company nearly every night at Goolgun, if the Goldwins were at home; there was card-playing, there was music. Goldwin sat down to whist or euchre with those willing to take a hand. Mrs. Goldwin sat at the piano to warble a ballad or gather a band about her for the practice of a quartette or a simple operetta, or to listen to musical lady friends rattling off waltz, or overture, or fantasia. As a rule, Larry joined the card-table, for he was averse to music. But one night he gave up his place to a stranger, and walked to the piano end of the drawing-room, where Mrs. Goldwin was practising in the early part of the evening, awaiting a small musical contingent for rehearsal. Larry did not go near her, but walked to a rose-wood filigree whatnot to take up a book from it. The whatnot was located in the

alcove of a bay-window, shut off, but not quite concealed, with its heavy and rich draperies festooned on each side. The light from one of the chandeliers, though subdued, still fell generously enough upon this elegant recess to admit of studying pictures, if not books. It was a nice little niche for Washington, and into it he went, unknown to Mrs. Goldwin. He had a habit of fixing himself there, of studying engravings and illustrated periodicals scattered on the whatnot. He took a periodical, and tried to shut out the din of music by putting his hands over his ears, as the book lay open on his knees. He still heard it, but presently it ceased, and he removed his hands with real relief, looking up, at the same time, to note why the piano had stopped. Mrs. Goldwin had risen to greet an arrival—the arrival was Lockstud. Larry forgot the pictures, and watched, unseen.

Mrs. Goldwin's face and Lockstud's back were opposite the niche. The wax lights of a candelabra just above the piano set them both in brightness. Mrs. Goldwin stood hand-locked with the manager, her face upturned to his, her lips moving, conveying sound, but not words, to Larry's ears. Washington Larry could only see, as he crouched and spied, that her laughing lips were not there, with the smiles usually pre-

sented when she wished to appear most affable ; that her eyes wore a new and strange expression, which enhanced her beauty ; that her features had lost their haughtiness ; that she was altogether a new being in that moment. Lockstud's position prevented him from undergoing a similar scrutiny. He stood straight and square before his hostess, with his head slightly bowed, as if in earnest attention to what she was saying. They only stood thus a few minutes, when part of the expected musical contingent — composed of gentlemen only—made an entry into the drawing-room. Mrs. Goldwin's countenance immediately took up its company mask of affability and smiles, and her tongue gave forth its attractive garrulity.

If Larry's loyalty to Jerry were not as strong as Mrs. Goldwin's was weak ; if he had not made up his mind that she was a fraud from the beginning, that she had married for position ; if she had been politic enough to have continued to show him that she wished to be friendly for his own sake, and not treated him like a pet hound of the master of the house ; if Lockstud had not set his teeth on an edge, and if her reception of the one man had not revealed to him that difference in her manner of greeting the few men who followed,

he might have fallen asleep in the alcove and subsequent painful events would never have transpired.

He did not go to sleep, but he brought a closed fist down on his knee, and with a prefatory oath he muttered, 'I knew I was right: she's flirting with that scoundrel, and Jerry's blind as a bat; but I'll open his eyes.'

It was this much penetration of his which worded a reply—being no reply—to Jerry's acclamation of marital blessing, 'Handsome is as handsome does.' Once he said to Jerry by way of 'opening his eyes,' much in the same way as a mother treats a wilful child to a homœopathic dose, which it swallows readily as an innocent drop of water, but which it would reject if the fact of medicine lurking within it were made known:

'Your wife is growing more beautiful every day.'

Jerry smiled and nodded.

'I can sit and look at her by the hour.'

Jerry smiled again, and said:

'You're welcome, mate.'

'And so can half a dozen chaps,' Larry continued. 'She is young, and can say pretty things, and look very sweet. If I was her husband, I should be jealous.'

'Once in a life-time is enough for that complaint,' responded Jerry, with a meaning not lost upon Larry. 'And you are not her husband.'

'Nor anybody else's, I'm glad to say; but if I was hers, I say, I should choke with the "green-eyed monster" that Tennyson or somebody else talks about. It ain't a thing that Holloway's pills is good for, or can cure.'

'Leaden pills, perhaps,' quoth Goldwin grimly.

'Dangerous,' came the laconic response.

'Not more dangerous than a fight and a fall.'

'You won't try that on again.'

'Not likely.'

And then Goldwin shook himself as if to throw off something unpleasant, and laughed at his mate, and his hints about 'green-eyed monsters' disturbing him now in his security of married life. He accepted this intimation of his friend's as so much incense to his wife's enticing charms. In a word, he rather relished the draught, but the dose was not strong enough, for his bat-like tendency stood unchanged.

In the meanwhile Mrs. Goldwin lived her butterfly existence, and gathered around her numerous friends or acquaintances, and was

perfectly ignorant that Mr. Washington Larry had a pair of double lens microscopic glasses set in his vision and directed at her to magnify her every look, her every action, into overpowering evidence against her and the man whom he conceived to be a second Launcelot. There was yet another pair of perhaps more powerful focus bent upon them when opportunity offered, and they belonged to Mrs. Calliport.

Mrs. Calliport could not make one of the Goldwins' guests, but Mrs. Goldwin since her marriage frequently visited Mrs. Calliport.

'You took me from her house, you know,' she averred to Jerry; 'if it had not been that she employed me, you and I might never have met, and I am grateful enough to her to like to sit with her and cheer her up sometimes.' And Jerry thought his wife an angel indeed.

Perhaps she would sit with her for an hour in the afternoon, and even ask to read to her as of old. For all these attentions Mrs. Calliport was none the less distrustful, not the more cordial.

It did happen now and then that she would spend an evening there, sometimes with her husband, sometimes without him, when he was

engaged elsewhere—at a meeting, probably. And it mostly happened that Lockstud with Priscilla would drop in on such occasions, for they lived now—of course in accordance with their improved circumstances—in a fine house also situated in Virginia Bay, not far from Mrs. Calliport's. This was very convenient for Mrs. Goldwin, who, when alone, called upon Lockstud to escort her home, but a couple of streets distant. These apparently casual meetings and the subsequent escorting to Goolgun at first instilled a sensation of disquietude—not doubt—in Mrs. Calliport's bosom, and that was only evoked by Priscilla's wistful face as she saw the two quit the room together, and heard them on the staircase as they descended, talking and laughing, and evidently so contented in each other's society.

When this sort of thing had taken place about half a dozen times, Lockstud began to come without his wife, excusing her absence on the plea of delicate health.

One night he sauntered in as usual when his aunt had visitors, but did not count Mrs. Goldwin among them, and only remained for half an hour. When he said 'good-bye,' she remarked:

'You are off early to-night.'

'Yes,' he answered; ''Cilla is alone, and she is not strong.'

Now, this was most exemplary, and one or two smiled at him, and all agreed that he was a model husband. Aunt Jessie did not smile, and an hour hence, when she was alone, she despatched a servant to her nephew's house with a message that she wanted to see him at once particularly. She was not surprised when the servant returned to say that Mr. Lockstud was out.

'Mrs. Lockstud said she was very sorry, ma'am,' explained the servant, 'and she would give your message to him as soon as ever he came home.'

'Very well,' said Mrs. Calliport; but in the solitude of her room she soliloquized: 'I must put a stop to this,' for Priscilla's face rose before her with its oval contour lengthening, and colourless and saddened. 'Is that siren at foul play?' she asked herself. 'If she is, he is scarcely responsible, for men will be fools when beautiful women are rogues. I must put a stop to it, if only for that poor child's sake.'

Theo came the next morning, having received his aunt's summons the night previous, when it was too late to attend. It had nonplussed him at the first, as he had distinctly told

her he was going home, and the lie would be apparent ; but he rose equal to the occasion, and went to her before going to the office. Having had a bad night, she was not yet dressed, but, donning a dressing-gown, she received him in her bedroom.

'Good-morning, aunt,' he began, as he went up to the couch where she reclined and gave her a dutiful kiss. 'Had a bad night again? You sent for me. What is the matter?'

He looked so handsome and strong as he stood there, hat in hand before her—even noble, she thought, with his upright figure and elegant proportions, his patrician bearing—that she for the moment shirked a lecture which had been diligently prepared for his benefit over-night, and smiled as usual in his face. 'Surely,' she mentally said, 'he could not stoop to such deceit—he, my adopted son, the only living creature left to me from my kin.'

'Yes, I sent for you,' she said aloud, and then hesitated, not knowing how to prevent him thinking she had laid a trap to catch him tripping in his truth ; 'sit down.'

He obeyed, putting his hat aside, and holding a thin cane with a silver kangaroo-headed top erect between his knees, its head at his moustache. At this point he helped her.

'I am sorry I was out when you sent for me last night, but when I left here for home, instead of stopping there as I intended, I changed my mind, because 'Cilla was not alone after all; her mother was there. Perhaps I'm not in love with my mother-in-law; at all events, I knew 'Cilla was in good hands and would not miss me. Do you want me to do anything for you in the city?' He spoke with the utmost candour, and stroked his moustache with the kangaroo's nose.

'No, Theo, I want nothing from the city, thank you; I simply want a confidential chat with you—nothing more.'

'Oh! is that all?' He leaned back in his chair, and a look crept over his face as if he were in expectation of a dentist immediately exercising his craft with the forceps at his jaws. 'Well, aunt, it is a long time since you called me over the coals,' he said, on the defensive already; 'but I don't think you have any reason to complain of me now, so I am safe; and, besides, I am getting a thousand a year, for which I am indebted to strangers, and not to relatives, who might have helped me to something better than a clerkship at a bank.'

This was meant for a hit at his sole relative, and was not unlike a challenge to arms. She

had stroked his fur the wrong way with the expressed desire for a confidential chat, because he knew what it meant—what it would lead to. Her confidential chat was but a synonym for a sermon, which invariably led to a moral *cul-de-sac* when addressed to him.

His manner and speech offended her enough to crust at once the tender mood with which she had greeted him.

'You are as touchy as ever,' she replied coldly; 'but I shall chance that, believing it to be my duty to speak to you of something which troubles me.'

He pulled out his watch and consulted it.

'It is nine o'clock. I have not long to give you.'

'I once fancied,' she went on, unheeding the hint, 'that you were fond of Isabella Gimp, and she of you; subsequent events went to prove that I was wrong; recent events, however, make me think that I was right.'

His lips curved downward at the corners; he leaned back in the chair still, and said but one word, chillingly polite:

'Proceed!'

'I intend to.' The blood began to mount to her temples; his coldness fired her. 'I demand an answer to a plain question. Am I right or am I wrong?'

'Both,' he said quietly: 'right in thinking we were fond of each other once; wrong in your present interference. I will trouble you to let me move my own way. I know what I am about.'

'May I ask what you are about? It seems to me that I have a right to know—to interfere.'

'Do you think I have not yet arrived at years of discretion?—that I must be advised at every turn? I am only doing what the whole world is doing for itself; if you must know—feathering my nest.'

'I don't understand you.' Aunt Jessie's eyes were flashing like his own, but where he was pale she was flushed. 'What has feathering your nest got to do with the subject?'

'Everything,' he replied shortly, beginning to drum at his teeth with the stick-head and staring at the opposite wall, avoiding a glance at his aunt.

'For heaven's sake, don't torture me with riddles!' she cried angrily, even with her voice raised. 'This is too serious a matter to talk over lightly. Why can't you speak out like a man?'

'I shall speak like the most dutiful of nephews, *ma tante*,' he answered, never once showing loss of temper, but concealing it beneath a tantalizing

nonchalance. 'I don't wish you to think me worse than I am, else I shouldn't trouble; but if there is any badness in the thing, it may strike you—it does me—that you are not wholly blameless. You were good enough to keep me grinding at the bank to the tune of one hundred and fifty a year, with the most motherly and creditable intentions no doubt; but it did not suit me, and when I see my way to getting into a good thing with a leap, you should praise me for my energy in availing myself of such an opportunity. If I failed to dance attendance on Mrs. Goldwin the way of the leap would be blocked, because—well, to put it delicately, she wishes to help me. I owe my present billet to her—not to her husband—entirely.'

'You mean, she cares for you as she should not?'

'Perhaps.'

Again he drummed at his teeth.

'And that you care for her as you should not?'

'I did not say so.'

'You imply it, then?'

'No; I have done with sentiment. I might have been maudlin once, but not now.' He looked at his watch for the second time, and was about to rise as he added, 'Are you satisfied?'

'Satisfied!' she exclaimed; 'I am bewildered—in a nightmare. You are not faultless, oh no! yet I loved to believe you only a wilful, headstrong lad, who would grow better and worthier with years; and now——' She stopped to turn her head away: she could not speak.

Theodore rose to his full height, shouldering his stick as if it were a gun, and spoke again.

'You were always addicted to making mountains out of molehills, and putting things in their worst light. She ought to have married me; but she played me a common trick, and is only anxious to make amends to which I am entitled. If I like her society, and she likes mine, I don't see what business it is of anybody's. I don't see why a man can't be attentive to and on intimate terms with a congenial companion without having ugly constructions put upon his actions——'

'Upon his motives,' interpolated Aunt Jessie under her breath; and then she stood up also and faced him, not gazing upon him with motherly pride and tenderness as she was wont to do. 'You are playing a base game,' she cried, 'a double game, feigning to be in that maudlin condition you deride in order to hoodwink a woman who does not act up to her vow at the altar, but feeds you from the hand she

dishonours. You are enriched at her husband's expense, yet through *her* influence. She is bad enough, but, of the two, she is better than you. She would like to be true to one, and you are false to all—to yourself, to the wife who is a thousand times too good for you ; though she says nothing to me, your neglect of herself and attention to that other creature is bitterness to her—is agony, and,' she added, as she drew herself up proudly to confront him with something like a threat, 'let me tell you that for her sake—for the sake of avoiding a public scandal—I am only withheld from going this very day to that infatuated, generous old man to expose the whole matter, to tell him to look after his young wife, who is not to be trusted.'

'I know you would like to ruin me,' he said sulkily, and then with confidence, 'but, fortunately for me, the scandal would touch you.'

'You know me better. I am not thinking of myself. I would expose that woman's deceit and perfidy if I could without implicating you.' She folded her hands and laid them on his breast ; her voice fell to gentleness as she continued appealingly, 'Theo, for the sake of your good name—no, for the sake of all that is right and proper, I implore you, stop at home with your loving wife, comfort her, tend her, and

leave that other woman; it is not too late.'

'Impracticable,' he asserted, with his long fingers playing nervously now on his cane.

'Mr. Goldwin is pleased with you. He has told me you are invaluable; be beholden to him alone.'

He made an impatient twist of his body.

'Do you know what you are talking about?' he asked.

'Every word,' she replied.

She sat down again, overcome, apparently exhausted, and lay back against the cushions with her eyes closed, her breathing wheezy and laboured, after her long speech. He made one turn down the room and back before he explained what he meant by 'impracticable.' He prefaced the explanation with a bitter laugh.

'You don't know—you don't know. If she swore that snow was black and grass was blue, he would believe at once that everybody but his wife was colour-blind, and that she alone had perfect sight. If she chose to tell him that I was mismanaging his affairs, he would straightway send me about my business, and then I should fall to the ground between two confounded stools. And she would do it if I faltered in my allegiance.'

In these latter sentences he forgot to control nature, which bubbled freely to his lips in passionate accents, as he struck at his unoccupied chair rather viciously with the cane.

Mrs. Calliport raised her lids at the thud of the stick on the seat of the chair, and looked up at her nephew. He was very dear to her—this sister's son, the baby boy she had promised to take for her own: to nurse, and train, and shelter; and she had tried to do her duty.

Fully alive to his faults, she yet thought she could see the subtle glittering of worthy traits in his character. He had been wild and profligate. What of that? A great many young men were wild and profligate. He would sow his oats and become an average good man, controlling his evil impulse in struggling to be better. But now this lust for gold was like an incurable disease, withering up all that was good in him. Had she failed in her duty, then? she asked herself, as her eyes were riveted on his face. Ought she to have given way to him, and offered him all the money he desired from her? It was a mental debate, and the ayes settled it. Better for him to be a spendthrift—to waste in speculation—than be what he was, a dishonourable man, an indifferent husband, a false friend. She had

withheld a loan of £1,000, thinking it the wisest course, and not from those miserly instincts with which he was so ready to credit her. She gave lavishly, but her charity was always guided by prudence. Prudence had forbidden an extensive liberality to her nephew, and now she thought she must have erred on the side of prudence. Her lips trembled, her eyes grew misty, and, with an effort, she rose to her feet for the second time during the interview, and putting her hands on his shoulders tenderly, she said with a beautiful earnestness :

'Give it all up ; give up that woman first, and, if needs must, give up the position which comes through her. You shall still have a thousand a year ; you shall enter into a business of your own. No, you shall be an independent man ; you shall not fall to the ground. I will do anything for you if you will be a true gentleman.'

'Your offer comes too late,' he replied ungraciously, and with undisguised bitterness, as he shifted uneasily beneath her two plump hands. She removed them quickly and reseated herself. 'Help under such conditions,' he said, 'would make Phillipia too hot for me. Your "true gentleman" would be subjected to those nods and winks and frowns, so trifling in

themselves, and yet each, like a grain of gunpowder in its way, would go towards making a heap which, being fired, would shatter a fellow's reputation; and Mrs. Goldwin herself, if provoked by bad play of mine, would be the first to set a lighted match to it. I know her, and it is but a harmless flirtation.'

'What an exalted opinion of one you honour with your attentions—of one congenial to you!'

Mrs. Calliport was forced into irony.

Theodore laughed derisively.

'I have much the same opinion of her as of most women. She simply likes her own way—don't you? And it is easier for a young, clever, beautiful woman to enforce it than for dolly-faced, feeble-minded creatures, such as you and I are acquainted with.'

Here he examined his watch for the third time.

Aunt Jessie, noting it, responded to the action, and while she looked upon him as a hopeless case, she said, with a ring of despair in her tones:

'Yes, it is late. You had better go. We have both lost time.'

His manner reflected hers at once. He carried his head high after bowing to the wisdom of her last words with freezing politeness.

'You are right, aunt. We have wasted time. Good-morning.' Thus they parted.

This was just the end he had foreseen to the confidential chat. He walked rapidly to the cab-stand near by, and was soon driving at double speed to the city—to the office.

As soon as Aunt Jessie was alone, she hid her face in her hands and reproached herself—not her nephew.

Her maid was rather surprised, about two hours later on, when she was told to send for a hansom. Mrs. Calliport did not keep a carriage, and this was also put down by Lockstud and many others as an effect of parsimony. He would have much preferred that his aunt should be driven through and about Phillipia in a style befitting her means; it would give him a certain prestige. But Mrs. Calliport did not go out often, and when she did preferred a hansom, with its closed doors, and hood lowered, and curtained windows, where she could sit nicely boxed up and all enwrapped in shawls and muffs.

'Are you going out this morning, ma'am?' asked the maid, who knew that her mistress was generally shut up best part of the day after a bad night.

'Yes; it is a lovely morning.'

'But you will be fatigued,' continued the girl, who, with the privilege of long service, could speak her mind at times.

'Go quickly, and do as I tell you!' said Mrs. Calliport sharply, not inclined to argue the matter.

She was obeyed instantly.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FOSTER-BROTHERS.

Priscilla Lockstud was at work that morning of Aunt Jessie's sermon to her husband, sitting, as usual, plying her needle industriously, and occupying an apartment which was more arbour than room, and where she should have been not so entirely opposed in her temperament to her bright surroundings.

It was a cosy, snug little bower, portioned off from a side veranda, and with three of its walls composed of trellis-work, and decked with thick creeping vines flowering in purple and crimson, and climbing baby roses, blooming within and without at their own sweet will. It contained only necessary furniture, but was alive and glowing with the beauties of God-creation, represented in luxuriant vegetable and animal life. Handsome dome-shaped gilt-wire cages were suspended from the ceiling or attached to the

nature-curtained walls, with each imprisoning a bird remarkable for plumage or song. In a far-off corner there stood a square aquarium, set within an artificial grotto of coral, seaweed, ferns and grasses, grouped harmoniously, and where gold-fish leaped and dived and floated continuously.

It was a divine arbour, full of fragrance, warmth, life, and colour, with the trilling and the twittering of the birds, the foliage and the perfume; and here Priscilla loved to bring her work. Theo had given her the birds and the fish. They had quite a handsome home now from garret to basement, and he had hinted something about getting a nice little phaeton and a pair of ponies—not so anxious to load her with luxuries as to flaunt his social position in the eyes of the world whose good opinion he courted.

She had quietly, apathetically, slipped into a nonentity, to whom he seldom opened his heart, whom he cloyed with sugar-plums, in the shape of pretty things for household or personal adornment, providing she was good and obedient, never resisting his wishes or interfering with his plans, which meant, 'Let me do as I please, go where I please, and ask no questions. Make no scenes, and you shall want for nothing.'

He even went far enough to ask Mrs. Glade, his mother-in-law, to share his roof—quite a piece of self-abnegation on his part, but which he determined to soften by more frequent flights from home than before. But it was not necessary, for Mrs. Glade declined, preferring to live alone.

Eve, sitting in solitude in Paradise, would perhaps supply another exalted conception to a Miltonic mind — a Paradise more gloomy, more desolate, than the island where Sindbad was cast, to thrive as best he could—a Paradise with a lonely disappointed Eve pining for a twin-soul to save her from oppression in the midst of Nature's glories; to open her ears to the melody of the tiny feathered songsters; to give her nostrils breath to inhale the fragrance of flowers and shrubs; her feet strength to tread the velvet sward; her hands and knees desire for prayerful attitude in spontaneous thanksgiving.

Priscilla was an Adamless Eve, sitting in her bower stitching at some diminutive garment of finest lawn.

She sat on a low arm-chair, and her needle went clicking in and out, out and in, with mechanical precision; the flowers, stirred with the gentle breeze, rustled softly; the fish

sported, while the morning sun-beams thrust their way through the network of foliage to fall in golden spots and broaden into circles of glittering light on the water of the aquarium, illuminating the red-gold sheen of its lively occupants as they curved and glided so gracefully and swiftly to and fro, as if dancing to the wild, sweet song of the merry birds. And, alas! Priscilla was indifferent to it all; she saw and heard, but with no quickened sense of rapture, with no leap of gratitude.

So indifferent was she, so fixed upon her work, that when the doorway leading from an inner room was filled with a portly figure and its threshold darkened, when even a heavy tread mingled discordantly with the bird-concert, she was not roused until a voice said:

'How busy we are!'

'Aunt Jessie!' cried 'Cilla, delighted and surprised, as she dropped her work on the floor and almost ran to embrace the welcome visitor. 'Come and sit down. It is just the right temperature here this morning for you. Oh, I am glad to see you!'

While she spoke, she led Mrs. Calliport to an easy couch, removed her gloves, her wraps, and then added, 'How did you come?' her whole expression beaming welcome.

'The usual way, my dear—in a hansom. The girl told me you were here, so I walked right through and found you. But I am not fit to be out, only I was too miserable to stay in the house. I want cheering up.'

'And I think I want cheering up, aunt, so we can just help each other.'

'Are you miserable too?' asked Mrs. Calliport, well aware that she was putting a superfluous question, and looking at her niece with those eyes which were so much like what Theo's could be at times, what they had been when he had only to woo to win her.

Priscilla reseated herself and took up her work again.

'Not exactly miserable,' she amended. 'It is because I am not contented, not pleased with all the things I have; I am out of temper with myself, and that is wrong; but I can't help it.'

'Poor child,' said Aunt Jessie soothingly. 'It is a pity you should feel so, and in such a pretty home.'

'Yes, indeed; and Theo has such excellent taste. Oh, that recalls your message to my mind. He said he would call upon you this morning, did he?'

'Oh yes.'

'Did you want him very badly last night?'

'No.' Aunt Jessie with difficulty here repressed a sigh, and asked: 'Will he be home to lunch? if not, I will stop with you, if you will have me.'

'Have you?' This brought a smile to Mrs. Lockstud's lips. 'I would have you here every day, selfishly speaking. I feel better already for your company. Theo always lunches in the city since he came to Virginia Bay. In our little house we were near mother's, and she could come to me when I could not get to her. Here it is all different; I am so much alone, with Theo away all day.'

'Why do you let him be away—not only all day, but very often of a night, too? Why do you let him go out so much without you?' Mrs. Calliport spoke almost snappishly, so much so that Priscilla looked up at her in surprise and saw tears in her eyes, which made her unheed the question, and say in sweet simplicity:

'You are not strong this morning. What can I do for you? Shall I order some light wine and a biscuit? Perhaps you are faint.'

'No, no, child; I want nothing. Let us talk quietly. It is this horrid complaint; it takes my breath away sometimes; don't mind me.' Mrs.

Calliport's breath was not affected that instant, but her heart was beating faster than usual, and she tried to hide the sympathy that was exciting it. She repeated her question in a different tone. 'I asked you why you let your husband go out so much without you.'

'Why? I—I don't know,' faltered 'Cilla. 'But should a man, because he happens to be married, always have his wife hanging about him wherever he goes? It hampers him; it makes him wish himself unmarried, perhaps. I like him to feel perfectly free.'

Her head bent lower over her sewing; her button mouth was not so rosy as formerly, but more set; her face was pale and much thinner. 'When he is sick he is glad to stop at home. I am of use to him then, and nobody else, he says, can nurse like me. He knows then that I care for nothing but his happiness.'

Mrs. Calliport made a gesture of impatience. It seemed to her that Priscilla took things too easily, that she was the feeble-minded creature alluded to by her nephew; that with more self-assertion and a stronger spirit, on her side, he might have been influenced to better habits.

She had reproached herself, and now she was ready to condemn his wife. Where she

herself had not been lenient enough, the other was too mild; between them both the threads of his character had been badly held and woven, the result being what it was—so many flaws in the woof.

'You are a perfect child, 'Cilla, in some things,' she exclaimed. 'You are altogether wrong.'

'That is what Theo often tells me,' replied 'Cilla very quietly, but with a shrinking from her aunt's censure, which, directed at her, was something quite new. 'I am sorry that you should think so too. Am I a child?'

'Yes—in some things,' reasserted Mrs. Calliport, with emphasis on the two last words; 'and you must not be a child any longer. Remember, you are a woman, with present and future responsibilities. You are a child in your submission. You are wrong in giving him so much freedom in letting him spend his time, as he does, with that Isabella Goldwin. There! now it is said, and I must speak for his sake and for your own.'

Mrs. Calliport paused for breath, and Priscilla, exhibiting a flush on her face which passed like a dissolving view, immediately to give place to more than the original paleness, said nothing, but sent her needle flying quicker.

'You don't like it,' continued Mrs. Calliport; 'I know you don't—I told you once before I could read faces, and I can read yours easily; and yet you sit down contentedly—I should say submissively—and let him dangle after her. Not a woman in a thousand would allow it, or take it passively, as you do, outwardly, not inwardly. You can't deceive me: you are fuming and fretting, and think you are hiding the fact. You are not. You think you are screening his faults from me—you are not. My dear—my dear,' Aunt Jessie clasped her hands here, and her voice quavered a bit, 'I see more than is good for me to see. I want to help you if I can.'

That feeble citadel of Mrs. Lockstud's own erection, wherein she thought to lock away all the shortcomings of her husband, fell at this moment as flat as the walls of Jericho before the warrior blast. It was taken before she was aware of it. Her work now lay idly in her lap, and she trembled from head to foot as she asked:

'How do you know? You never go out. Has anybody told you?'

Here was a tacit surrender.

'How do I know?' replied her aunt; 'because I have eyes and ears and senses. Have

I not seen you sit still at my own house, and let him take her home over and over again? If you had anything but the spirit of a mouse you couldn't sit still; you would go with them, and guard him from the breath of scandal—counteract her baneful influence.'

At this Priscilla gave way entirely, and, hiding her face in both hands, she cried silently.

Mrs. Calliport thought it best to let her alone; though in a measure impatient with her evident apathy, she was full of commiseration for the neglected wife, and felt sure that a confidant would sooth, if not remove, her trouble.

Presently poor Priscilla lifted her head, and, oh, what a pitiful white face, what pale lips, were turned to Aunt Jessie! Next she spoke with a little difficulty:

'He never should have married me. I know I am only a simple woman—no companion for him. I can nurse him when he is ailing at all—can look after his house; but I can never, never be what *she* is to him. She is clever, she is beautiful and attractive to all men who, like Theo, are not proof against her fascination. I don't blame Theo. I can't blame him, because he is more attached to her than to me. She is not only beautiful, she is clever, and can

talk well, where I can't. He tries to be good to me in his own way, and if I suffer it is because I am so different to her, so unable to suffice him. Don't blame him, aunt.'

'She is a wretch!' boldly asserted Mrs. Calliport. 'Cilla did not contradict this, and allowed Aunt Jessie to continue. 'And I can give you this much comfort: Theo's attentions are diplomacy from beginning to end, but, all the same, scandalous—wicked!'

'Well, aunt, child as you say I am, I also am diplomatic. If I spoke to Theo about his constant attention to Mrs. Goldwin, I should bring down twofold misery on my own head, because when he is angry with me it kills me, and when I leave him to do as he pleases he is never angry, and so in that way we get along peacefully. Don't ask me to try another way, aunt; if you did a thousand times I could not try. I shall—I must—make the best of it, since he has married a woman not suitable to him. His diplomacy, aunt, is not a burden to him, and it is not, surely, all diplomacy that keeps him continually at her side, but it is because I am the wrong woman "to counteract her baneful influence," as you say. Perhaps when baby comes it will do what I can't do—keep him more at home.'

These latter sentences were distinct from all the rest, because of a tender ring of hope breathed through them, which sent tears again to the eyes of the elder lady.

'When baby comes' were words which were as the refrain of a hymn which Priscilla had set herself to learn the latter months. 'When baby comes!' That period of her life was expected to bring to her a Messianic beatitude. When the heart of the husband should be turned to the wife, when baby hands and baby voice should work a miracle, even as the prophet with his rod smote the rock and brought forth a rush of life-giving water. The child, like the prophet, was to be but a divine agent, and by a touch to create a love-stream for her.

But five or six weeks before the arrival of this anticipated olive-branch, another little messenger of gladness was ushered into the world, the gladness being almost of an individual character, and breaking into sunshine over the grateful heart of Jeremiah Goldwin, for to him was born a son and heir.

How quietly he crept to his wife's bedside, and watched her admiringly as she slept, with her face camellia-white, and lips paled to coral pink; her wide, heavily-fringed lids closed in

slumber; her hair, a golden tangle of soft-spun silk, all astray over the pillow — an aureole about a small shapely head; her arms and hands thrown carelessly over the silken coverlid; her slender fingers still glistening with diamonds!

If ever Goldwin prayed in his life, an unspoken prayer framed itself now — a mute thanksgiving from the depths of a soul capable of strong and mighty love. How reverently he turned to the infant in its long lacy robes, as it was carried to him in the nurse's arms! How lovingly he gazed at the puny, pinky face! How tenderly he lifted a tiny hand, with its Lilliputian shrunken fingers, so helpless, so soft, so velvety, to let it lie on his broad palm like a daisy on a slice of bark, while he marvelled at its perfection.

He had never seen a new-born baby in his life, and never thought to see one of his own, and now this mite before him was actually his son—the son of an old age—more than his Benjamin—neither eldest nor youngest, but his only one. He would have liked to take it in his big arms, but felt sheepish in the presence of the motherly old nurse—capped, spectacled, and slippered—as she crooned and purred and mounted guard over her precious charge, appeal-

ing in its sweet helplessness to all that was womanly in her, yet, as the son of a millionaire, exciting all that was worldly.

But alas for poor Priscilla! The advent of her longed-for babe brought her none of that indescribable joy which the mother's heart should know.

Instead of a new-found bliss there came chaos—chaos of mind and body, and a rush of fevered blood to drive reason from her brain and strength from her limbs. She was desperately ill.

As for Lockstud, if paternity invested him with a new-born pride, it was not strong enough to break through his supercilious dignity, and excite such an emotional whirl of sentiment as that which was upheaving and overflowing from the soul of the jubilant millionaire, whose fatherhood struck off a tithe of his years.

Under the circumstances, perhaps, it was natural that the first-born—usually the harbinger of blessing to young hopeful parents—being but the herald of sickness and misery, could make no happy stir in the household. Indeed, it was of quite minor importance, and, moreover, was not in the house at all, which needs some explanation.

Mrs. Goldwin's son at this time was six weeks old, and though she was in fair health, and not altogether a stranger to maternal affection, yet a devotion which was likely to interfere with social duties and daily pleasures was for her decidedly objectionable. Therefore was she desirous of seeking a substitute to relieve her of an office which should have been her pleasure.

Mrs. Calliport's philanthropical characteristics have already been alluded to, and owing to them there existed many petitioners the better for her bounty. It is with one of these we have to do—a young woman who had been in Mrs. Calliport's service, and married from her employer's house.

She was a Mrs. Dripper, recently widowed by an accident, and left almost destitute, with two children, one being an infant of six weeks, and dying.

She would have fared badly enough but for Mrs. Calliport, who, learning of Mrs. Goldwin's wish for a foster-mother for her son, secured the place for the widow, while undertaking to give the remaining child to reliable care during her service at Goolgun.

So Mrs. Dripper was duly installed at Goolgun when her charge was but three weeks

old, and her own little one had departed to join the band of seraphim. And when it came to pass that the infant Lockstud cried out in vain for the solace of the young mother, when doctors advised its complete removal from the house to ensure perfect quiet until Mrs. Lockstud could be pronounced out of danger, Mrs. Dripper, hearing of it, and anxious to earn as much as she could for herself and orphan, pleaded to Mrs. Calliport and Mrs. Goldwin both to let her have this second child also, since she was strong and hearty, and could attend to both children well.

Mrs. Calliport would have preferred Theo's boy to be nursed at her own home, that she might watch over him; but, willing to assist Mrs. Dripper all she could, was overruled by the force of charity, and made no objection.

Mrs. Goldwin was perfectly indifferent in the matter, as to whether Mrs. Dripper had half a dozen children to nurse, providing it did not interfere with the proper management of her own child. Two babies in the nursery would effect no change in her life, would never block her pleasures, so why should she put any obstacle in the way of Mrs. Dripper's interest?

The nursery was at the top of the house, so that cry or scream could scarcely assail her ears, or if reaching her at all, would be too much mellowed by distance to cause nerve-irritation.

Sometimes—but very seldom—she did mount the staircase to visit the infant domain; but as a rule the child was brought down to her daily after its morning bath, and nursed by her for half an hour or so, and, this duty being performed, she was free of motherhood's claims for the ensuing twenty-three hours.

In this way Mrs. Dripper found no difficulty in doubling her wages and responsibility, and Priscilla's son was nourished at Goolgun away from the mother whose embrace he was yet to learn, whose warm lips he was yet to feel, whose smiles and utterances of thanksgiving, and whose soft cooing baby language of holy love, were all alike lurking behind the fell hand of fever, which shadowed her home like a pall.

It was a gloomy house for all concerned. It irritated Lockstud, filled as it was with whispers and sad faces, nurses and stealthy-creeping footsteps.

He missed the hundred and one comforts which money alone cannot buy — the true

heart that mostly anticipated his wants, the hands that ministered to his pleasures ungrudgingly.

It was a hateful house to him, with Aunt Jessie's sighs, and Mrs. Glade's eyes red with constant weeping. He felt only in the way at home, so he absented himself, and spent most of his leisure at Goolgun, where there were no tears, no lamentations, to weary him, and where his child was located.

'Which is which?' he once asked Mrs. Dripper, smiling in jest, and yet puzzled in earnest, as she stood before him with a child on each arm; and Mrs. Goldwin, standing by, looked on with an amused expression.

'Lor, sir!' came the reply, 'I don't believe I should know them myself, only your boy is double-jointed, so I'd tell them in the dark.'

'Upon my word!' put in Mrs. Goldwin, 'they might well be mixed, and each given over to the wrong parents.'

'In that case,' said Lockstud, 'Mrs. Dripper would spare us advertising for a Solomon to pick the right mother.'

He glanced from one child to the other, and back again, as his long fingers stroked and twisted his moustache. He observed in each

the same blue eyes; the same undecided prominence in a tiny dab of flesh, bearing twin holes, representing a nose; the same soft, pure, flower-like skin; the same dimensions; the same almost bald, round heads, save for a slight growth of fair silky down; and neither child was robust.

Sometimes days would pass, and he would never ask to see his son, content to hear from Mrs. Goldwin, who heard it from Mrs. Dripper, that he was doing nicely. Nevertheless, he would remain some time talking to Mrs. Goldwin, or waiting to see her husband, before going to the city to give or receive information or instruction relative to business. Sometimes Goldwin kept him waiting a long time, while he, unlike his wife, was in the nursery fondling his boy, or watching the process of dressing, with unsophisticated delight.

'I have been having a few words with the future Premier of Georgius,' he remarked one morning on entering the breakfast-room by way of apology for detaining his manager, and added: 'What are you going to do with your boy?'

'Oh,' laughed Lockstud back, 'the Premier shall decide it. He shall give him a portfolio.'

The 'future Premier' had been christened, and there had been feasting and revelry. His name was Roland Kovodel.

His mother had wrinkled her aristocratic nose in disgust at the name of Kovodel, but as she knew that her husband was not to be moved when he had once resolved to do a thing, she gave way amiably by allowing that to be his second name, while she should choose his first. Goldwin consented to this, saying she could have any high-flown gim-crack name she liked, so long as he could back it with Kovodel.

Lockstud's boy was also christened, but without joybells of any kind; and Goldwin, for some inexplicable reason, was averse to the name chosen for him by Mrs. Calliport, and accepted by her nephew without question.

'It belonged to one who was very dear to your poor mother,' she told Theo, 'and should be bestowed in her memory.'

So the child was received into the Church as Cecil. But it was a very remarkable thing that Mrs. Calliport was also strangely moved over Goldwin's decision to call his son Kovodel. It aroused sad memories,

and she wondered why of all the names to be selected he should have picked out one so uncommon, and yet so painfully familiar, to her.

The solution belonged to the far-off future.

CHAPTER VIII.

WASHINGTON LARRY TAKES A CROOKED AIM AT THE FOE, AND BRINGS DOWN THE FRIEND.

'THEY have called him Cecil.'

It was Goldwin who spoke. It was nine o'clock at night, and he was sitting opposite his quondam mate, with one arm resting on the table, where glasses stood together with a decanter of whisky and jug of hot water, a plate of cut lemons, a bowl of sugar, and tea-spoons. It was almost like old times, thought Larry, when no 'yaller-haired witch' or fussy baby had wedged themselves in between him and Jerry. Goldwin often came to him like this, bringing in a breath of the happier days, because he, Larry, had gradually ceased visiting Goolgun; and when his friend asked why, the answer was that he loved his own nest too well. Jerry was not going to quarrel with him for this, because he had once shirked

going out visiting himself, and he knew quite well that the Goolgun society which he indulged in for his wife's sake could have no attraction for such as Larry; but he did not know that the true answer was withheld.

Washington's hate for Lockstud had by now reached such a pitch that he sickened when compelled to remain in the same room with him; and as Lockstud was constantly at Goolgun, it seemed to Washington that there was no room for him there. He entertained the same opinion of Jerry's wife as ever, but somewhat modified, for, with all his viciousness directed at Lockstud, he considered him to a great extent responsible for her conduct, and for craft and devilry a Mephistopheles.

This hate was perfectly mutual between the two men. Lockstud, occasionally obliged to come into contact with his employer's *protégé*, used domineering tones towards him, or treated him with contempt. Washington in return gave snarls, and by gesture or action token of his deep set abhorrence.

Longing to show him up to Jerry in his true colours, he had not yet determined how best to set about it; but the Fates decided it sooner than he expected.

Goldwin was talking of Lockstud's child, not

because of any particular attention it had attracted to itself from him, but because of the name it had received. It was with quite a disconcerted expression he remarked to Larry:

'They have called him Cecil.'

Washington, with his cat on his knee, and putting his pipe from him to lie unheeded for awhile on the table, answered briefly:

'Coincidence.'

'Of course,' said Jerry, 'but it is queer, for all that. There might be fifty Cecils in Phillipia, but for me to be asked to stand godfather to a Cecil—that's the rub! It took my breath away when Lockstud told me of it, and asked me to stand. Belle was present, and I forgot myself, and bawled out: "A thousand devils! can't you fork out any other name but that?" Afterwards I could have knocked my head against the wall, for Belle was vexed, and I just said the first thing that came to my tongue without thinking, and felt lowered after, you see, before her and Lockstud, who never forgets himself. He only bowed, and said like a gentleman, he was sorry it was too late; the child was registered Cecil. Hang me! but that fellow is a gentleman, every inch of him. I wish I was more like him.'

Goldwin, for the sake of his wife, had been doing his utmost to emulate the gentlemen she extolled as examples of good breeding, but he was everlastingly the victim of a *faux pas*, saying things better left unsaid, and treading unwittingly on other people's toes, though his blunt honesty and generous principles made him many friends. He felt shamefaced after having decried the child's name for no especial reason given, and in such unpolished vulgar terms of expression, and he felt shamefaced now as he alluded to it ; but sudden surprise chased anything like remorse completely away.

Washington's hand was lifted from the cat's back, and, being converted into a fist, came down on the table with the force of a falling brick, to make his pipe dance, the glasses jingle, and to send Cicero leaping in terror from his lap.

'A gentleman, you call him!' he cried, his voice actually shaking with passion ; and he was not a violent man, but for the nonce it seemed that he and Jerry had exchanged tempers—'a gentleman! May all such gentlemen be hanged, quartered, and pitched into the sea, to rid the country of pests.'

Goldwin, having recovered the shock of

seeing the calm Larry suddenly frenzied, answered coolly :

'I know you're not in love with him.'

'No, I'm not ; but'—he felt urged to say—'but I know who is.' Yet, feeling this to be premature, he stopped short. This allusion to Lockstud had quickened his desire for a shot at him—had stirred a smouldering fire to blaze. With a creditable effort to control his wrath, he allowed his voice to fall before he continued : 'See here, mate ; I want to ask you a question.'

'Ask away, Wash ; it is just nine. Belle is sitting with Mrs. Calliport to-night ; she's given up a party to sit with her, and she's that unselfish she won't hear of me troubling to go for her, but says the footman can escort her home ; but I am going to give myself the pleasure—not the trouble—to call instead of the footman. She will stay till ten, so there's time for a hundred questions and answers.'

Washington, unheeding this rambling allusion to Mrs. Goldwin's self-denial, made no reference to it, but put forth his question :

'What would you think of a chap standing by, and seeing a serpent at another man's feet, in the grass, unbeknown to that man, just on the point of running his fangs in his heels to

do for him, if that chap didn't do his best to throttle the serpent, and call off that man, the man, mind, being his best friend, too—now what would you think, or what would you do?'

'I'd lynch him,' decided Jerry at once, with a pull at his glass for a draught of hot toddy.

'You'd lynch him. Very well, now you have said it. Whatever happens, remember, you urged me to do it, or sent me to be lynched.'

Here Larry sprang from his chair like a Jack-in-the-box, and began to pace the parlour for a few seconds, his hands under his coat-tails, his face full of contortion. Figuratively he was shouldering arms, and about to level a musket at Lockstud, with a preliminary poke of its bayonet in Goldwin's sides. Cicero, who had been hesitating whether to spring into his lap again or not, now walked after him, stopping when he stopped, and rubbing his whiskers against his beloved master's boots. Larry turned his ferret eyes on Goldwin's broad rosy self-satisfied face, now expressing curiosity, and something stuck in his throat.

Presently, with difficulty and not altogether in his natural voice, he spoke again:

'Jerry, old fellow, you know—you must know I'd hold my right hand in a blazing fire, and let it scorch to powder, to save you

from harm. And, thunder! I'm scorching up now, but I can't hold out no longer.'

'What's up, Wash?' asked Goldwin, with the self-satisfied expression giving way to anxiety. He quite made up his mind that something was wrong at the office, and Lockstud at fault. 'What's up? Don't beat about the bush. I know if you talk like this it is no light thing.'

Larry thought he would let the truth fall more lightly by circumnavigating this way, so he continued, levelling his musket to strike at his enemy far off, merely grazing him, however, with the bullet, which made an unexpected cannon to lodge in the bosom of his friend.

'Did you ever hear of the chap in the play? Joseph Surface was his name. I remember that. Shakespeare it was that wrote of him—no, it wasn't him; it was—Dickens. No, it wasn't him, either—never mind; whoever it was, he knowed a thing or two of human nature at its worst when he made up Joseph Surface. He was an oily-tongued, double-faced villain, and you have him in your "gentleman," Mr. Theodore Lockstud.'

So part of the truth began to ooze and relieve the suffering of the speaker through the bursting of a sort of mental ulcerous

affection, a clot of bruised unhealthy blood, an ominous swelling ripe for the knife.

Goldwin's praise of Lockstud had severed it as the keen edge of a lance; it broke and disgorged itself in a loathsome flow, which meant mitigation and a certain deliverance of stifled pain.

The cat, receiving no encouragement from Washington, walked over to Jerry, his next best friend, and, standing upright on his hind-legs, let his forepaws rest on Jerry's knees. Jerry's big hand stroked the dumb pet mechanically, while his impatience was manifested in a quick 'Well, go on, can't you?'

Larry's blundering musket-pike was pricking him a bit.

But just then Larry could not go on; he was mute for another few seconds; for shooting at Lockstud meant a shot at Jerry's wife, too; to expose one meant to expose the other; and perhaps he began to feel like Virginius did with the weapon raised to plunge into the bosom of his sweet young daughter for honour's sake.

'Go on,' repeated Jerry—'out with it, man. I'm ready to hear anything you have to tell me. Say there's a deficit somewhere in the books, and that Lockstud knows all about it. Only prove your words—prove your words.'

Cicero, tired of standing, jumped confidingly on to the arm of Goldwin's chair, to have his coat brushed rather roughly, Goldwin's hand now working with an agitation which ran through his body and gave sharpness to his accents.

Larry could not prove his words—that was the worst of it—and he stood stock still and silent, knowing Jerry to be on the wrong track, and that Lockstud, if a thief of a kind, was no money-pilferer. After a painful pause, he began again:

'There ain't a deficit in the books that I know of. I can't prove anything—I only know I'm right. I tell you there's a serpent up to mischief, and its name is Lockstud. You are too fond of him, and he is too fond of—of somebody else.'

'Come and sit down, can't you?' exclaimed Jerry, his temper beginning to mount and fly off in sparks. 'And don't stand there like a ghost!'

There was a suspicion of violence in this demand, while his fingers all unconsciously vented their quickened pulsation in a fierce grip on poor Cicero's neck, which the animal resented in double-quick time with his weapon of defence, a strong claw, thus inflicting a gaping

scratch on the offending hand, for which swift retribution came in the shape of an angry kick, preceded by a push from lap to floor. Cicero went whining away to coil himself at a respectful distance and forget his injuries in slumber.

Both men, always humane, were so absorbed with the subject under discussion that the dumb creature's wrongs evoked no indignation or sympathy from Larry, and excited no remorse in Jerry, on whose hand there was an ugly wound of which he took no notice after the first sting. Larry obeyed. It seemed to him as if he were in a burning building with red-hot timber, glass, and plaster about to envelop him, with dense smoke at his eyes, nostrils, and lungs, and with arms outstretched to rescue his friend from débris and disaster. That Jerry's temper would rise he felt to a certainty, and was ready to forgive him for any harshness.

He sat down, put both his arms on the table, leaned across it, and with nervous fingers began to roll the stem of his pipe to and fro till the bowl rocked like a boat in a squall. Larry himself was in a squall, and getting giddy.

'There's nothing wrong with the business, old man. Don't be hard on me because I want to put you right; there's a heap gone wrong with your gentleman.'

Another pause, broken by a warning oath from Goldwin, and a ferocious command to be 'out with it.' Larry knew that the squall was in his teeth now, and almost gasped for breath, while trying to rally his failing courage in throwing Lockstud overboard.

'I want you to see for yourself,' he said at last. 'I want to warn you—I have been waiting for you to see things, and as you don't, why, it is my duty to speak, ain't it? My blood has been boiling for a long time; now it is boiled over. I want you to watch that scoundrel, because he is always at your wife's elbow, not only at Goolgun in your presence, but other places. And she——'

Something in Goldwin's face caused Larry to hesitate here. A fierce bull-dog look had settled about the mouth, and his hand was clenched—the hand that bore the angry blood-line of Cicero's claw.

'Well, what else?' he asked, not loudly, but with stifled passion, as he bent forward to hear more. '"She," you said—'she what?'

'She encourages him, that's all. He is the worst. He won't let her settle down into a sedate party; she is young, and she likes young men.'

'It is a lie!' thundered Jerry.

'I hope it is,' answered Larry.

Trembling at the storm he had conjured up, he leaped from his chair, and turned his back upon his friend, so tortured with the agony he saw on his countenance that it compelled him not to witness it as he gave the rest of what frail evidence he had to bear him out.

'I don't say she is false to you, mind that; but I will say she likes him best—I haven't watched her for nothing. I've heard your friends, your aristocrats, a-whispering and nodding over it when they never took no notice of an old figure-head like me. And I think it right you should know of it and keep a tighter hand on her, and send him about his business.'

Jerry never speaking, and Larry's head turned from him, he went on with less shrinking:

'He's been coming and going a goodish bit while his poor wife is about dying. Coming to see his son, you think. Well, you're wrong. *I* never heard him ask to see him yet. He follows her everywhere, I tell you, and makes appointments where you ain't likely to join them.'

Larry was a rattlesnake before Goldwin that minute, and his words the rattle of it.

Goldwin could have throttled him.

Larry was prepared for violence—for a terrific explosion of some sort; it was best to get it over, he thought, as he waited to hear the smash of glasses and the crashing splintering of the decanter against a wall. He began to cower like a faithful brute who is ready to caress the hand holding a whip above his head —to crouch before the stern 'Lie down, sir.'

But none of these anticipations was fulfilled. Goldwin had risen certainly with a desperate desire to hurl something at Larry's devoted head, but remained standing and holding on to the edge of the table as if paralyzed and dumb-stricken—so dumb that Larry was forced to face him again and see that all the ruddy colour was banished from his cheeks and lips, to see his face set like stone.

He would have preferred the natural explosion; or was this a fatal calmness heralding the hurricane? He went over to him and placed a hand on his shoulder.

'Mate, if you look that way, I'll go and hang myself! By thunder I will! Come, stamp, kick; be yourself!' He shook him, and added: 'Do you mind Cecil Kovodel? None of that now.'

'Ay, Cecil Kovodel!' cried Goldwin, at last finding speech as if with a magic touch.

When the wretched slave-driver of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' wished to revive a fainting female slave, he did not resort to the usual restoratives, but prodded her temples with a pin. Much in the same way did the utterance of that name revive poor Jerry, smarting and sore, but fully conscious.

'Ay, Cecil Kovodel!'

Repeating this, he fell, rather than reseated himself, in the chair, threw his arms upward, and next fell forward over the table in an abandoned position, with his great grizzled head bowed between his arms and his burly frame shaking.

Washington Larry turned away again; he had not expected this. A distant episode of his life was recalled strangely, and he experienced a weird sensation that had come to him but once before when a boy standing at a newly-closed grave. He heard distinctly the 'earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust' of the parson over what remained of the mother he had dearly loved. His throat began to swell and his eyes to float, even a wild, husky sob escaped him. The sob smote Jerry's ears, and made him rise once more to walk to Larry's side with an unsteady gait and catch at his arm.

'You have done your duty!' he cried. 'Why do you fret?'

The voice was not Jerry's, nor the bitterness of the irony which could not escape his perturbed mate.

'You have vilified my wife; you were always dead against her!' Here a curse fell like a stone for weight upon Larry's head and made him wince. 'You have done for Lockstud. Now what more do you want, eh? Do you fret for me? Well, don't.' His voice quavered high as he rang out his next words with a wild defiance. 'I don't believe it, say your worst. If you were anybody else but who you are, if it wasn't for what you've done for me, if it wasn't for the memory of Cecil Kovodel, maybe I'd forget myself and strangle you for a liar! Do you think I'm going to be fooled twice—swallow the things you've tried to ram down my throat and nigh choked me with? I don't—I won't believe you, Washington Larry!'

He loosed his hold on Washington's arm, and with harsh conviction gnawing at his soul, and refusal of belief welling over from his lips, he turned away and walked quickly but unsteadily out of the house and into the street, leaving no kindly word or look behind, but a sense of suffocation in the air for Larry.

So our David and Jonathan clashed for the first time in their united lives.

Larry stood aghast and gaping. Realizing now that his laudable intentions to insure the peace of his benefactor had only sown discord between them, and not the seed of the fruit desired—the disgrace and expulsion of the man he hated—he swore and pulled at his beard, and banged a chair upon the floor before he sat down sideways upon it and collapsed with his head upon an arm curved over its back, and with his heart as full of grief and despair as Jerry's had been but a few moments previous.

Cicero's slumbers were not disturbed by a peculiar low whine in the room which otherwise would have probably excited in him sense of danger and created an abnormally erect tail. He slept, and his master groaned; for Jerry had broken his word, and all but lynched him for a duty not left undone.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH MRS. CALLIPORT FAILS AS MONITRESS, AND JERRY STOOPS TO SPY.

Mrs. Calliport, whose soul was exceedingly troubled over the critical condition of Priscilla Lockstud, had been drawn from her warm rooms more frequently of late, if only to look on the dear face of the innocent, affectionate, suffering girl who had won her heart so thoroughly. Mrs. Glade was always at her daughter's side now, and both she and Mrs. Calliport were so absorbed in their anxiety for the patient that her little son still lacked that infantile worship which reversed circumstances would certainly have kindled for him. It seemed only necessary at present to know that he was being well cared for.

But owing to unfavourable weather Mrs. Calliport had to give up going out for a time, and was obliged to be content with daily

bulletins from her nephew concerning his wife. Asthma was troubling her less than Priscilla, although it was bad enough to confine her to the house and make her an invalid.

Mrs. Goldwin paid her particular attention, and now and then forfeited a sociable and pleasant evening elsewhere for her sake.

Mrs. Calliport was inclined to be indifferent, and not over-grateful, if courteous, in receiving these favours.

She was sitting well propped up with pillows in a throne-like chair, set before a grate of glowing coals in the drawing-room, when Isabella Goldwin came to her one night to keep her company.

Mrs. Calliport's pink face was less pink than usual, and wore a decided look of worry as it apparently emerged from a heap of shawls, and her hazel eyes were restless, and went constantly wandering to a square marble clock which stood on the mantelshelf almost immediately opposite to her. Mrs. Goldwin was as bright as a sky-lark, her accents clear and loud, with rapid utterance, as she gave forth a stream of gossip to cheer the invalid; and Mrs. Calliport was made to understand all about the latest style in bonnets, the latest fad of society, the last fashionable novel, the new fittings of Mrs. Geebung's

drawing-room, the private theatricals of Mrs. Somebodyelse, the dress of this one, the manner of that one. She was not disposed to exercise her lungs in a similar way, so had nothing to do but listen, and was content in that she was not called upon to talk, and could cast furtive glances at the clock, which was just about to strike nine. Mrs. Goldwin, noting this anxiety about the time, at last ceased her babble to say:

'I am tiring you, perhaps.'

'No,' affirmed Mrs. Calliport, rather feebly as regards heartiness; 'but I am anxious about 'Cilla, and expect a message every moment to let me know how she is. I like to hear of her every morning as soon as possible, and every night as late as possible.'

This was half the truth. She was waiting for the message, but did not think it necessary to tell her that Theo would be the most likely messenger, and she was wishing that Mrs. Goldwin would take her departure before he should arrive.

Since that morning of her confidential chat with him, which he chose to call a sermon, he, not wishing to offend her, for reasons of his own, and not willing to give up his attentions to Mrs. Goldwin, had been doing his best to

maintain peaceful relations with both women; for his aunt, he told himself, would always be a friend in need, whereas the caprice of the other lady compelled him to be less sanguine about her leniency towards him, did he once incur her displeasure. So, to propitiate the former, he never by any chance appeared before her in company with the latter. But gossip was rife, and his aunt's ears were assailed with rumours which irritated her, and it was none the less annoying to think that he would probably meet Mrs. Goldwin this very night and again become her escort to Goolgun.

While thus troubled, it occurred to her that as Theo's aunt it would not be amiss for her to throw out a few hints to this woman, just in a friendly way, to acquaint her with reports, and beg her to stop them if possible by some action of her own. And, again, she believed that Mrs. Goldwin, being young and beautiful, spoiled by adulation and wealth and a blindly indulgent husband, might really need a friendly hand held out to her in warning; and why should not her hand go forth on the mission?

She thought she might have time to say a few words before her nephew's arrival, so after that intimation relative to the expected bulletin had been given, she added:

'It would be ungrateful for me to be tired, knowing you have given up cheerful company for my sake. And why? I don't know. To tell you the truth, it never struck me that you really could consider me as a friend—in the deepest sense of the word, mind—it doesn't strike me now. You must be actuated by sympathy, for which I am bound to be grateful.'

'And why not by friendship?' asked Mrs. Goldwin, as she reddened ever so slightly, and shook out the soft folds of her skirt to settle herself more comfortably as one who prepares to listen with interest. 'Why not for friendship? I desire to be friendly, and perhaps I am grateful, too. Through being with you I met my husband.'

'And my nephew,' thought Mrs. Calliport, with a mild cynical look which did not please Mrs. Goldwin, who was noting her features, which changed quickly, however, subsiding into their usual sweetness as she spoke in reply. 'I understand the friendship as you mean it; but I said friendship in the deepest sense of the word. I think honest friendship does not imply the blindness of love, for instance. If one whom we take a very deep interest in should err unwittingly or wilfully, we should

not be true friends to look on without endeavouring to check or quietly counsel. Open rebuke is honest, and secret censure despicable. It is because I want to be a true friend I feel impelled to speak to you as I do this minute, and am anxious not to offend. May I speak?'

'To me?' asked Mrs. Goldwin, with some surprise and a little vexation, yet not without a lurking amusement, as she remembered Theo's allusions to his aunt's provoking tendencies for preaching. 'Oh, certainly; go on. I am all attention.'

She turned her face to the 'preacher,' and stared at her, not without an impertinent hostility flashing from her eyes and puckering her lips.

Mrs. Calliport was twisting nervously the fringe of her shawl, and did not observe this cross-fire as she unconsciously plaited the threads and was considering her next words.

'Well, I don't feel able to talk much, and am not going to preamble. You think, perhaps, because I go out so seldom, and see so few, that I hear nothing of what is going on around me. I assure you I hear a great deal more than is pleasant—much that is painful. I hear your name coupled as it should not be with my nephew's, and you may not be aware of it;

therefore, as a friend, I advise you to be more cautious.'

'Yes!'

Mrs. Goldwin elevated her eyebrows as if surprised.

'Yes,' continued Mrs. Calliport; 'and you are young, and may not be aware, either, that a married woman cannot encourage the constant attention of one man more than another —excepting the one who has a right to be her favoured attendant —without exciting comment.'

'It is very good of you to put me on my guard,' said Mrs. Goldwin, with a little mock humility; 'but perhaps *you* are not aware that you are alluding to a crowd that will stretch its neck and cackle like a flock of geese without a notion of what it is cackling about.'

'I don't know anything of the sort. I do know that smoke indicates a fire.'

'And some fires are not only harmless, but wholesome,' laughed Mrs. Goldwin unpleasantly. 'Hearth fires as per sample;' she nodded her head towards the blazing coals. 'You see, it keeps the chilly air at bay for you to-night.'

'And fire burns more often than not, remember, if you play with it carelessly—if one is imprudent enough to forget its power for mischief and ruin,' came the quick retort.

Mrs. Calliport looked her visitor full in the face now, and did not relish the cool resistance she saw boldly written there, to tell her that the desired guiding hand was being rudely thrust away, that the silly frivolous creature would not be persuaded to stop digging a pit wherein to sink her own reputation.

'Well, don't alarm yourself,' replied Mrs. Goldwin. 'If I choose to warm myself at a fire, I'll not burn my hands; and I don't see why your nephew and I should forego the delight of each other's society to stop the cackling, especially when my husband thinks quite as much of him as I do.'

Mrs. Calliport was not so ready to believe this latter assertion, but she only remarked:

'Delights should not include defiance of public opinion.'

'Our delight *does*, then.'

Mrs. Goldwin here made no attempt to disguise her real feeling beneath a mask of chilly meekness. She bridled up, her eyes began to gleam, her delicate nostrils to dilate, her fingers to interlace.

'Do you consider it prudent,' asked Mrs. Calliport—'we won't even add kind—for him to be ever at your house when his sweet young wife is lying sick to death, as I hear

he is when chance offers, instead of being at her bedside?'

Again her eyes sought the dial of the clock, and then moved back to her companion's face, where the lids almost curtained the eyes as they were lowered, seemingly examining the rings on her fingers.

'If he could do his "sweet young wife" any good,' came the answer, given in low but emphatic tones, without any raising of the wide, ivory-tinted lids, 'by gluing himself to her bedside and weeping and wailing, it would be more than unkind—it would be sinful; but as it is, it would be sinful for him not to make the best of his life if he can, and go where he can find consolation and some happiness.'

This reasoning was peculiar, and was not acceptable to Mrs. Calliport, who began to look upon Mrs. Goldwin as upon a handsome untrained colt planting his legs as stiff as iron rails on the ground, and refusing to budge an inch, even with the slashing of the whip at his back, and the frantic 'Get up!' roared in his ear.

'Your sophistry would be amusing were it not so painful,' replied Mrs. Calliport. 'It is not only since his wife's illness that he has

sought "consolation and happiness" elsewhere; it has always been the same, almost from the time your husband appointed him his manager.'

'Well, and if your nephew is not happy in his married life, what has that to do with me?'

This with a toss of her head upward, and a glare at her hostess, whom she was inwardly condemning as an officious and disagreeable advocate for propriety. It had more to do with her than Mrs. Calliport could possibly suppose, so she only said:

'He has no right whatever to be unhappy with such a wife as he has, and you know it.'

'You are mistaken: I don't know it. She is too good for him; he has said so himself. It is an unfortunate thing when a man finds he is mated to an angel, and not a woman—a woman whose ideas will not be entirely built upon his, whose opinion will clash with his at times to give the companionship a piquancy, and save it from dull uniformity. It would be better for Mrs. Lockstud never to rise from her bed. She is not meant for this wicked world, and would be better out of it.'

'Are you serious?' asked Mrs. Calliport, with a shocked countenance.

'Perfectly.'

Mrs. Goldwin now began to study the clock also, and compare it with her own watch. She was quite cool and collected again as Mrs. Calliport, roused to indignation, said with vehemence :

'Better would it be for the world and all men did such angels fill it, instead of the worldly, frivolous creatures who are not worthy of the name of woman.'

Mrs. Goldwin calmly smiled as she immediately fitted the ugly cap to her own head, and thought it becoming.

'It will be better for the world,' went on Mrs. Calliport, 'that Priscilla should live, and become the mother of boys and girls who shall develop in the future all the virtues of the mother, without the evils of the father. He is my nephew, and dear to me, but I can't remain blind to his faults ; indeed, my eyes are rudely opened to many things.'

'My enormity included,' put in Mrs. Goldwin lightly.

Mrs. Calliport gave no answer. She had failed to impress upon her guest the fear of that danger which she was courting or attracting by imprudent steps. She was somewhat offended, too, and disinclined to speak another word.

Mrs. Goldwin was likewise nettled, but it suited her to dissemble and dawdle, although she rose ostensibly to take her leave, and gathered her wraps, which she had carelessly tossed on to a chair beside her on her entrance.

'I don't like quarrelling, Mrs. Calliport,' she said; 'and for fear we might I had better go, but before I do I wish you to understand that I don't care a fig'—here she filliped a dainty thumb and finger—'for people's talk, and don't intend to let them annoy me or prevent me enjoying myself my own way. Don't let them annoy you; that's my advice. I will not wait to be called for, as intended. Perhaps you will be good enough to allow one of your servants to take me home; it is only a stone's-throw from here.'

Mrs. Calliport was too willing to comply with her request, as her hearty 'Certainly' betrayed; but the word had scarcely left her lips when the street-door bell pealed, and Mrs. Goldwin, with an assumed astonishment, exclaimed:

'Company—at this hour?'

'It is the message I am expecting.'

Mrs. Calliport feared it was Theo, but, as she could not prevent this meeting, had to make the best of it.

'I will wait and hear it, then.'

Both women, worked by different emotions, turned anxiously towards the drawing-room door as it opened and Theodore Lockstud entered, to spread a smile of satisfaction on Mrs. Goldwin's face, not reflected by any means upon his aunt's.

The night was cold and cloudy, with drizzling rain, and Theo came in unceremoniously with his great-coat on, but unbuttoned, and flying open as the draught through the opened doors followed him into the warm room, and made Mrs. Calliport draw her shawls closer about her.

He shook hands with his aunt and his friend, and remained standing, warming his hands in his coat-pockets; but before Mrs. Calliport could ask how 'Cilla was, he turned to Mrs. Goldwin, and said:

'This is really kind of you, to come and sit with aunt and cheer her up.'

They were looking at each other, and of course did not see Mrs. Calliport protest against this statement by gesture only.

'And you are very good just to turn up in time to take me home,' said Mrs. Goldwin, with her wraps over her arm, and sealskin cap in her hand ready to don, as she gave a little

mischievous smile. 'I believe I have tired out your poor aunt, and will be more than good to take myself away. Please take me away.'

She set the cap jauntily on her yellow hair, and began to enrol herself in cloak and sables.

'How is 'Cilla?' at last asked Theo's aunt, as soon as this incorrigible woman would allow her to speak.

Theo shrugged his shoulders, and replied:

'Just the same.'

'It is something to be able to say no worse,' responded Mrs. Calliport resignedly.

'That is a right way of viewing it, aunt, and that is all I have to tell; so, as you are tired, I will take Mrs. Goldwin away, with your permission, and bring, I hope, a better bulletin in the morning before I go to the office.'

Saying which, he bent down to give her a dutiful kiss, and Mrs. Goldwin, with an audacity all her own, followed his example by coolly placing her lips on the elder lady's forehead with a little speech meant to be conciliatory:

'Difference of opinion should never divide friends.'

And then, passing her arm confidingly

through Lockstud's, she left the room with him, her whole attitude and bearing declaring as plainly as words: 'For all that, I defy even you.'

Instead of ringing for her maid and retiring when they were gone, Mrs. Calliport got up from her chair and began to walk the room. It was nearly half-past nine, but the time was unheeded now, even as her physical annoyances.

She clasped her hands, and looked up to heaven, and wildly asked what was to be done. It is difficult to say how much longer she would have gone on talking and walking and praying for help, but for a second loud ringing of the street-door bell.

'Can they have returned, or is it dreadful news about that poor child?' she thought.

It was neither, but her agitation was none the less when Mr. Goldwin, having forgotten all the Chesterfield hints with which his wife had been trying to reduce his roughness of habit, having asked no questions of the servant who had admitted him, and had been passed in silence, pushed open the drawing-room door from the hall, and abruptly asked of the lady of the house:

'Where is my wife?'

Now, Mr. Goldwin was allowed to be eccentric occasionally, and was known to indulge moderately enough to steer clear of bacchanalian improprieties; but this minute he presented no Rechabite exterior to Mrs. Calliport's startled vision, for his walk was far from steady, his eyes were swollen and glazed, his general aspect was one of intoxication, and she shrank from him in alarm, as from a drunken man, and yet his breath had not the taint of the drunkard as he, standing before her, peered round the room, and asked gruffly:

'Where's my wife?'

'Gone home,' said Mrs. Calliport in fear and trembling, 'and you had better go home, too.'

'Gone home,' he echoed, and then: 'With—not by herself?'

'No; with my nephew.'

'With your nephew?' he echoed again stupidly, and next, as if he had suddenly realized the meaning of the words, he added, 'Yes, yes; I see. Good-night,' and staggered out of the room with as little regard to etiquette as he had displayed upon his entrance.

The door closed on him, to Mrs. Calliport's relief.

Once outside in the street, away from the glare of the gas-lamps, nobody could see him raise his hands to his head—seemingly on fire, and ready to part with every throb at its brain—to hold it tightly between his horny palms while he tried to think.

Mrs. Calliport's distant manner and cold looks did not affect him in the least, simply because he had not noticed either. He only sought his wife, and being told she had gone home, and with Mr. Lockstud, he intended to follow.

His faith in his friend was so strong that it grappled with the love of his wife, though he had attacked him to defend the accused and shield her from anything like calumny.

Unpalatable truths are mostly resented, yet must be accepted. Shut the door in truth's face, and probably it will creep through the keyhole and every available crevice; for had not Jerry violently slammed the door against it, and yet all the same it began to wriggle through like a reptile, to coil about his heart with the strength of a boa-constrictor?

There were two fierce currents surging within him, rushing from opposing sources, to embrace in mad fight, to seethe and roar in hot antagonism—worship of wife and faith in friend.

The latter urged him to watch for himself; it had mesmerized him against his will, had forced an imaginary disc before his mental sight.

Staring at it, he saw his Belle changing rapidly before him, till her fair head was likened unto that of a Medusa. Every bright hair was writhing and twisting, and then by swift and magical evolution became a living snake, while he, looking on, was turning to stone; and there were niches in his memory towards which every snake of that terrible head darted a forked and hissing tongue, while on each of the foremost tongues he saw inscribed as in flame a letter, and he, unlike Belshazzar, called for no interpreter, for the letters stood arrayed before him in order and blazing with fury, for him to spell distinctly the word RETRIBUTION.

Washington Larry had much to answer for. Goldwin had reverenced his wife as a woman, had worshipped her as the mother of his son. Hitherto her caprice had amused, her vivacity charmed, her loveliness intoxicated him. Her youth made him as lenient and indulgent as an over-fond, unwise father, who must see his child happy at any cost. It pleased him to see her courted and flattered, and his vanity was

bloated with the thought of actual possession of such a treasury of charms — with the conviction that he could inspire love in the bosom of a sweet and lovely woman—a mere girl, revelling in her power of evoking at will admiration and approbation, as most women thus gifted do. It never struck him to doubt her professions of affection for himself; such a face, as he read it, could only index perfection of principle; such lips could never frame falsehood. For him she was veiled in sanctity—a new Mokanna—and now Larry had dared to drag the silver veil from her person and discover deformity. Was it any wonder that his hand had itched to clutch at Larry's throat? What wonder that he had behaved ungentlemanly enough to shock tranquil respectability?

So, staggering still, he bent his steps homeward, irresistibly forced to spy.

CHAPTER X.

OCULAR DEMONSTRATION AND ITS RESULT.

Isabella Goldwin and her favoured chevalier were in the Goolgun drawing-room.

They had not come home direct from Mrs. Calliport's, but had at first taken a brisk walk together through the misty, drizzling atmosphere, rather enjoying it under cover of wraps. Being a chilly night, all the doors, windows, and Venetians were closed. The door leading to the veranda before notified had stained glass framing its panels and no blinds, but there fell before it purple velvet, richly fringed curtains artistically draped, and not so closely drawn as to prevent anybody sufficiently alive with curiosity from peeping and observing through the coloured glass, though each glimpse was bound to take its hue from the tints of the vantage pane. There was a fanlight above this door, which for ventilation was but slightly

opened, yet wide enough to admit passage of sound as well as of air, and through it Isabella's laugh floated to the veranda. She had thrown off her cap and cloak and sables, and was resting on an ottoman. Lockstud sat next to her, still encased in his great-coat, with one arm thrown carelessly over the ottoman and running parallel with her shoulders, and the hand of the other warming in his pocket.

She was telling him of Aunt Jessie's preaching—how she had refuted her argument, and how she had shocked her. The recital created the laugh.

She was a perfect actress, and could imitate to the life. She made her listener laugh, too, with her momentary production of Mrs. Calliport's facial expression of horror and astonishment; nevertheless, he ventured to remonstrate on her lack of diplomacy in thus fencing with his aunt, to which she replied:

'You are afraid of her; I am not. She is one of the flock of geese. She can flap her wings and chase and pant as long as she pleases at shadows; it doesn't hurt; it amuses me. *I* don't want her money, but I should like you to get it. You always were shortsighted, and it isn't the first time I have had to knock a meaning into your head. It will be all the better

for you if I pose as the sinner, and you as the sinned against—you the innocent fly and I the wicked spider.'

The 'innocent fly' laughed quietly, and only said :

'You are really a delightfully wicked little woman.'

'What does your good aunt think?' she asked with mock solemnity.

'If she were a man, she would think you an enchantress.'

'As you do. Well, you are wrong; I am not one. If I were, I would beat back this stream of wretched gossip, and in that I am as powerless as Canute with the waves. And give you up I cannot, for we are spiritually mated.'

'Why do you say that now? You should have said it long ago, and would not.'

'Why were you not a millionaire? Why is poverty hateful to me? Why do I abhor stuffy rooms, and cheap dinners, and turned dresses? We should have been wretched, and love, perhaps, would have taken wings through the window.'

Lockstud did not say that so far as he was concerned it had flown already, but that it was necessary to keep on hand a cheap imitation—a false Cupid—a glitter of paste for the lost

diamond, too cleverly executed for her detection, because policy directed him to keep up the illusion.

'You were too hasty, too impatient,' he reminded her.

'And so were you,' she retorted, 'to avenge me.'

'Not to avenge you,' he amended; 'to console myself.'

'With a saint who has disappointed you.'

'You were over-hasty,' he repeated, ignoring this latter remark. 'Millionaires are not made in a day; yours was not. I might be one before I'm an old man, if I have the turning of Aunt Jessie's money.'

'Asthmatic constitutions are tough. She may outlive you and me.'

'All the more reason for giving in to her now.'

'What, by keeping apart or meeting as utter strangers?'

'By seeming to agree with her.'

'Come, I don't like that; I am better than you, after all, and will not act more than compelled to. It is a relief to speak out fearlessly sometimes. Why not let her know that we are dear to each other—are affinities, determined to join hands over the bridge which Fate has

erected to divide us, and not be wholly parted to satisfy sober conventionality ?'

'You are not such a wicked woman, then.'

'Perhaps I am, for if you wavered in your affection, if I thought you really cared for your saint, I would—I think I would—kill you. Lunacy is not responsible for desperate deeds.'

'You know I am your slave.'

This was in a sense quite true. He bowed as he said it, and lifted her hand to his lips.

She looked at him tenderly, with her face turned to the stained-glass door.

'And that you will not desert me to stop the croaking of the ravens overhead and behind our backs,' she added.

Their voices were not loud enough to reach the veranda in words, but fell there in low humming tones, while a pair of eyes, bloodshot and eager, were glued at a blood-red pane and saw from whence the humming proceeded, saw the whole scene within. To a disordered mind it presented a picture worthy of Doré—an infernal fiery region, crimsoned from ceiling to carpet, with two demons laving in a Plutonic, unconsuming fire, yelling and mocking at their victim, who was breathlessly, insanely watching.

'And now'—the female demon's lips were

moving in rapid speech—'I will tell Jeffrey you saw me home, and that you hurried away to your wife. He will think the better of you, of course, for that. He will be here presently, for I told him not to call for me, and that I would be back by ten. You see, I asked after your poor wife at your house this afternoon, and being apprised of your dutiful attentions to your aunt night and morning, I determined to be dutiful, too; *ergo* I gave up a party for her sake to-night, and got my reward. We have had one of our long talks unwatched, I hope.'

'Now to be cut short'—the second demon pulled at its moustache and showed its teeth—'in order to get a pat on the back from your husband, I suppose.'

'To be continued in our next.' The first demon threw back its head and laughed discordantly.

Then they rose together from the ottoman, and the first demon said:

'Let us say good-night here, and James shall show you out in real conventional, not-to-be-talked-at style. Good-night.'

Both demons now held each other's hands, and next their faces met, and the whole room became a vast moving sea of blood, tempest-tossed, and a low groan of anguish escaped

from the victim simultaneously with the sound of a distant bell to summon the footman.

'James, show Mr. Lockstud to the door, and when your master returns tell him he will find me in my boudoir.'

So spake Mrs. Goldwin.

James's master, as it seemed, did not return to Goolgun that night, but was admitted early the next morning, long before the breakfast-hour, when Mrs. Goldwin was still sleeping serenely, her lord's absence not having alarmed her sufficiently to spoil a night's rest. The footman, who had opened the door to his master, came to much the same conclusion as Mrs. Calliport had concerning him the night previous, but made no sign outwardly until in the kitchen, where his comments were received and discussed according to the manner of scandal 'below-stairs.'

Jeremiah Goldwin looked as if he had been in the thick of the drizzling rain of the night. His hair was damp—even clotted here and there with hardened mud-splashes; his hat was battered and soiled, his boots and clothes streaked and bespattered with mud, and there was a wound on his right hand.

He made no remark to the man, but with a dogged, sullen look walked by him to make

way to his own room and satisfy his servant that he not only had been conspicuous in a drunken fight, but was ashamed of it. The room he sought was office, library, and smoking-apartment combined. Arriving there, he kicked the door, shut, and then locked it.

When Mrs. Goldwin heard later on where he was, she, naturally surprised at the unusual occurrence of his absence from home all night, went to seek him.

She found the door secured, and with a Mother Eve impulse she stooped to peer through the keyhole. His back was turned to her, but she could see him sitting at his escritoire and writing, his body bent well forward, his head bowed.

She lifted herself up, and knocked thrice before eliciting any answer.

'Who's there?'

The words were choked as if breathed through suffocating lungs.

'It is I, Jeffrey; open the door.'

'Let me be!' came the second reply, likewise choked.

She thought he must be suffering from a severe cold, and that she had misunderstood him.

What could a churlish 'Let me be' mean?

She waited a second in expectation of his advance to open the door at her bidding, but no such obedience was rendered. It was a remarkable contrast to his former behaviour, all homage and devotion to her wishes, and it made her draw herself up proudly like an offended queen.

'He will wait a long time before I ask for admission again,' she thought, with wounded vanity. And yet she had to ask, and be refused, too, a second time, much sooner than she expected.

Her husband continued undisturbed at his writing, which he kept at till mid-day, never asking for food to be brought to him, never seeking it. At twelve o'clock he rang his bell, and James answered it.

'Where is Mrs. Goldwin?' he asked.

'I don't know, sir; perhaps she is in her room. Shall I ask?'

'No; don't disturb her, and fetch me a cab.'

He spoke gently, but his outward appearance was unchanged—unwashed, unshaven, unkempt, and mud-stained. He was perfectly unconscious of this.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' the man ventured to say, 'but your clothes want a brush, sir.'

'Do they? Well, brush me.'

'And get you some lunch, sir?'

'Lunch!' Jerry asked in surprise, as if a ridiculous question had been put to him. 'I'm not hungry.'

James retired, to return with a clothes-brush and touch his master up a bit to look respectable, and then proceeded to secure a cab, and in it our millionaire left Goolgun never to return.

He drove to his lawyer's office, and was closeted with him for more than an hour.

When he stood up to leave, his burly frame suddenly bent, and then measured itself on the floor. He fell in a swoon.

A dash of water at his head, a drop of spirit at his throat, revived him, and he opened his eyes to see the lawyer bending over him anxiously.

'What has happened?' he inquired, looking about him dazed and giddy.

'Lost your equilibrium, that's all,' replied the lawyer lightly, to relieve his client of any anxiety.

'That's all!' echoed Jerry, trying to rise, and forgetting the lawyer's presence. 'I wish it was more; I wish it was de—— No, I don't; I've got to see Wash—poor old Wash!—and make it up. I've got to nurse my little fellow. My business is done here.' Then he roused

himself with a shake, and added: 'I'm dreaming, I think. Don't mind what I've been saying.' His senses were strong and keen again as he got to his feet with help, and said 'Thank you, Tackerline.'

'You have a heavy cold, Mr. Goldwin,' said Mr. Tackerline; 'you ought to go home and nurse it. And what's the matter with your right hand?'

'A cat's scratch,' said Goldwin, making light of the wound, which was more than a scratch now, and adding quickly: 'I'll go now; the cab is waiting.'

Mr. Tackerline, afraid to let him walk alone, took him by the arm, and conducted him safely to the cab.

'Drive to Goolgun—quick!' he ordered the cabman.

'No,' cried Jerry from within—'no; not there. Tell him'—he hesitated, tried to think, and then, as if pleased with some idea working in his mind: 'tell him—Bachelor's Nest, M—— Road, Virginia Bay.'

The cab drove off.

Later on that day word came to Mrs. Goldwin that her husband was lying ill at his friend's house—his old quarters—and could not be moved.

The carriage was ordered at once, and she was driven to Bachelor's Nest for speed's sake, not for distance, which was slight.

Washington Larry confronted her at the entrance.

'I have come to see my husband,' she began.

'Sorry to disappoint a friend,' said Larry. 'You mustn't see him.'

He did not look at her, but over her bonnet, as if at something behind it, and his attitude indicated that disposition towards her which is known as 'crowing.' There was triumph in his face.

'But I say I *will* see him. Are you his doctor?'

She made an effort to cross the threshold, and he put out his arms straight on both sides of the doorway, and said:

'And I say you shan't. This is my house, and he is in my care, and I ain't going to have him worrited.'

She would have killed him with a look, as she gazed at him scornfully from head to foot, from his narrow shrivelled parchment face, with its wild growth of hair and beard, down to his feet, which were cased in Chinamen's slippers —the better for quiet attendance in the sick-room—and up to his head again.

'If I were a man,' she exclaimed, 'I would horsewhip you into good manners! Are you aware, sir, that you are insulting a lady in your own house—the house you owe to my husband —that you are outraging the law of hospitality?'

'I don't want you to learn me what's right and what's wrong. There's crimes a lot bigger than turning you away from my door. You'd better go home and find 'em out, for I ain't going to tell you. But I'll tell you this much: Your husband don't want to see you, so don't trouble to call again. He's willing to keep quiet, but he won't if you worry him with a sight of you this minute. Perhaps you understand now why I "outrage the laws of hospitality," as you call 'em, and will go away.'

Mrs. Goldwin quivered with more than passion, for, with the winding up of this speech, he brought down his arms to his sides, and turned from her to get back to Jerry, knowing quite well that she would make no attempt to pass the open door after what he had said. And he was right; she did not.

She was driven rapidly home, and began to feel that, in warming her hands too closely or carelessly at the fire, which Mrs. Calliport had warned her against, she had in reality burned

her fingers to the bone, and she suffered in suspense.

There was no need to doubt that her husband had discovered her more than friendship for the man he had so willingly assisted at her instigation.

She was not in love with her husband, but she had grace enough to feel grateful to him, and to respect all that was good in him, and there was much.

She was in love with his adoration of, and liberality towards, herself. For him to turn from her in anger or disgust was what she had hitherto cleverly avoided by treating her former lover in his presence with the mere cordiality of friendship; and in her dependence upon his belief in the loyalty professed, she walked safely until the croak of the ravens she had despised had sounded a knell in his ears.

Who was the raven at fault now? she thought. Intuition pointed at once to his bosom friend, for he would have believed none else against her.

She began to regret that she had not kept up the farce of her affability with him from the day of their meeting at City Park, to regret her evident carelessness, to wonder what was going to happen next, and to tremble at the

prospect of meeting her husband's wrath when he should be better, for she feared him in his anger. She sat back well in her carriage, upright and haughty, but sickening with fear and anticipation.

Washington Larry was not alarmed about Jerry at the outset of his illness; on the contrary, he was jubilant. He looked upon his return to Bachelor's Nest as an excellent omen. Probably he would part from his wife now, since he had acknowledged that his friend's penetration was not wrong, and had come there to get away from her, and be nursed by him. Washington believed Jerry to be a giant in his strength, despite advancing years, able to surmount ordinary ailments, and crush them, with his Herculean vigour, as pigmies. He had come to him ill and haggard-looking, weak for want of food, bent with misery, and with incipient bronchitis, owing to exposure, creeping to his lungs.

'Give us a bed here, Wash?' he asked as he entered the house, to cheer at once Larry's drooping spirits. 'I've seen enough. You're right. Don't bother me with questions. Let us have the old times over again, and give me my old bed; I'm in for a cold.' He dropped on to the sofa in an exhausted con-

dition, putting his hand in his breast-pocket, to draw from it an official envelope filled to repletion with pages of writing—his work of that morning—and said: 'Put this by, old chap, till I ask you for it.'

Larry took it at once in custody, noting that it was addressed 'To MY SON ROLAND KOVODEL GOLDWIN,' and looked at Jerry curiously.

''Tis all right,' said Jerry, in answer to the look. 'You keep it by you, I tell you, until I ask for it.'

He did not say what was uppermost in his mind—that he would never ask for it—nor did he tell Larry how he had spied through the blood-red pane on his own veranda; how the demons had danced in his brain, and yelled and mocked at him; how he had cursed under his breath, and groaned aloud; how he had rushed away to the flight of stone steps leading to the lawn; how, blind and reeling, he had fallen headlong from top to bottom, striking his wounded hand on the stone in an effort to save his fall; how he had managed to rise, bruised and shaken, to totter away, and again fall headlong at the fountain basin, to lie there he knew not how long, not caring to rise, and but dimly conscious.

The raindrops, pattering on his face and

bared head, had served to revive him, while the chilled damp air filled his lungs. Half witted, he had almost revelled in the wet, grassy, baneful couch, and cursed at the daylight as the morning sun peered through a thin, watery cloud to shine in his eyes, and somewhat restore him to a sense of his surroundings, and let loose the bitter truth from its torpor chain—to compel him to at once put his house in order.

He never told this to his friend, or a soul beside. He went to his bed, and lay down, determined never to rise, and protesting against medical advice, physic, and visits from curious friends.

His chest was clogged, his cough hacking, his hand, poisoned with the scratch of the cat—the evil augmented by the blow on the stone steps—was swollen and inflamed; but he would have no unguent, nothing but a cold-water bandage to allay its heat.

If Larry attempted to insist upon going for a doctor, he swore, and lashed into violence that could only be subdued by obedience to his wishes. He had his little son brought to him some time every day to gather him in his arms, and mutter, 'Why born?' He would gaze wistfully into the baby face, and scarcely see

him for tears. Once he hugged him so closely that the child screamed aloud, and could not be pacified for quite an hour by Mrs. Dripper, who waited without.

Through Mrs. Dripper it became known that Mr. Goldwin was ill—too ill to be removed to his own residence. It likewise got abroad that nobody was allowed to see him, that his wife, weakened from over-anxiety, could not go to him: yet nobody believed his illness to be serious, because of his robust constitution, not even Larry, until the last few days of his life, when, to the horror and torture of this untiring, devoted nurse, delirium took possession of his brain, and convulsions of his body with relentless strength. Then Larry at all risks flew like a madman for doctors, and cried like a woman at their just rebuke for calling them when the mischief was irreparable, when bronchitis was choking the patient through the unpardonable delay, and tetanus —the result of the scratch and subsequent wound—held him in its vile grip, and wrung his big frame with contortion and twist.

There came calls and knocks and messages by the score to Bachelor's Nest. 'How is he now?' was the constant query. Servants from Goolgun, with awed tones and long faces,

came to and fro, and lastly Mrs. Goldwin herself.

Larry did not attempt to interfere with her this time. His triumph was transient, giving way to dejection and contrition.

Like Christian with the burden upon his back, he was overweighted with misery and remorse, and bowed down, knowing what mischief his too ready tongue had worked ; for his more than brother was hastened to his end through him.

If he heard, he never heeded, and Mrs. Goldwin entered unannounced, unimpeded, as he crouched in silent mourning at the foot of the dying man's bed.

Too full of agitation, she passed him without a single glance, to stand at the bedside, heavily veiled, and gaze on the wreck of a vigorous life that, like a sturdy ship sailing confidingly on lake-like seas and beneath clear skies, was now splitting on a treacherous reef.

Not she the reef, she thought, but another, the tale-bearer. Upon his soul should the burden of the sin be laid. She had but favoured one man's society more than another's, but anglers for scandal had caught a herring and blown it into a whale to shock her husband and crush his wife. So she meditated ; yet stirred

by some compunction for her pretence towards him in return for all he gave, she lifted her veil to set an atoning kiss upon his forehead—the first voluntarily given—by way of expiation for her incapacity for wifely devotion.

With the raising of this gauzy curtain, meant to hide her supposed weeping eyes from the vulgar crowd, she saw more clearly, and the kiss was deferred, for she shuddered at the havoc presented in the drawn features, set jaws, sunken sockets, and hollowed cheeks.

She shrank from touching him with her lips as he lay there unconscious, after a cruel spasm. She had never seen death, never felt it on the wing ; but she felt it now like a piercing wind that precedes the blast, and it made her heart stand still and her limbs tremble with dread, as if she herself stood in an open grave with loathsome things crawling about her limbs.

The philosopher hath truly said, 'Men fear death as children fear the dark.'

They know not what shadow lurks behind it, and quake at fear-begotten phantoms while crying for light.

Controlling repulsion in a desperate effort for self-satisfaction's sake to make some amends, she bent over the prostrate, helpless figure, and laid what she thought a peace-offering on her

husband's brow with a quick, sharp movement, and then dropped her veil and made a rapid exit from the room, where Death grinned at her from every corner, to hurry home to Goolgun, knowing not that her offence would materially affect her future, and agitated with more than the prospect of mere widowhood.

So Jeremiah Goldwin died after a ten days' illness—died in the arms of the friend who had risked life for him, and had now hurried him into eternity.

Mrs. Goldwin awoke the morning after her visit to learn that the days of Lucky Jerry and his wife's spurious love were no more; that December had left May to a natural season of summer; that she was the millionaire's widow!

CHAPTER XI.

THE WILL TRAPS THE WIDOW AND WRECKS HER SATELLITE.

The city of Phillipia was startled and disconcerted over the death of one of its wealthiest, ay, one of its best men. Nobody had expected such a crisis until the fiat of the doctors had gone forth, 'No hope,' and then all who knew Jeremiah Goldwin in his hardihood found it difficult to realize that he was suddenly mowed down like this by the all-conquering scythe, to be gathered to his fathers before the infirmities of age had claimed him, or warned of approaching dissolution. But it was true, and Phillipia was excited, though the excitement was but an exaggerated form of the ripple that follows the dropping of a stone in the pool: the spot pierced and instantaneously closed; a wrinkled circle on the surface of the water, widening quickly; and then subsidence into the original condition, untroubled and glassy.

Following the report of Jeremiah Goldwin's death there arose a hum of voices on all sides; in the drawing-room, in the kitchen, at the bar, in the club, in the restaurant, in the tavern, in the street, the quiver of sensational emotion ran and eddied and whirlpooled.

There appeared in the dailies and weeklies of the press lengthy paragraphs, each giving an interesting synopsis of the career of the millionaire, extolling his merits, and winding up with a pathetic touch upon the affliction of the fair young widow.

After the funeral the great crowd of followers returned to home or occupation, and the bubble and babble ceased, for all things were as they had been, and the grave had closed over what remained of Jeremiah Goldwin—the stone had been cast into the pool. A few outsiders of the inquisitive kind pricked up their ears to catch rumours of the will; but their curiosity was not so soon to be gratified, as the reading was delayed to give time for one individual interested to be present. This was one Captain Timothy Pennacove, an old friend of the deceased, to whom Jerry had considered himself indebted for certain invaluable services rendered in his early manhood, and who, at his desire, had resigned his sea-life in order to settle down for

the rest of his days as an overseer of one of his stations of North Flindersland.

Accordingly he was telegraphed for, and came as quickly as it was possible for steam to carry him. He was a hale, hearty, corpulent, tall, elderly man, with a wreath of scanty snow-white hair and brows to match, but so thick and bushy as to give one the impression that they had originally been intended for moustaches and had mistaken their locality. His face was ruddy and cleanly shaven, with a pair of strong, keen blue eyes, capable of much gentleness of expression, in seeming contradiction to the fierce brows overhanging them.

His arrival was the signal for the assembly of but four people in that very room at Goolgun where poor Jerry had been occupied last in his own house, writing page after page to be given into Washington Larry's care.

All present were alike impressed with the importance and solemnity of the occasion, but each soul was stirred differently.

The lawyer, John Tackerline, for instance, was dreading to begin, yet impatient to be done with the roll of parchment lying on the table before him, for he knew its contents, of course, and chafed at them.

When Mr. Goldwin had instructed him to

draw out a fresh will, that morning of the swoon, he had obeyed, and taken a rough draft of conditions, without comment upon their injustice, because he believed his client to be suffering under a transient vindictive disposition, provoked, no doubt, by some peccadillo of his gay young wife, who was already exciting public opinion against herself. But she was a beautiful woman, young and brilliant, with charms and graces not to be confined in a harem, and he argued that it was but natural she should be enticing, and her husband jealous, but it was also natural that in his calmer moments he should forgive and make allowance for youth.

John Tackerline, therefore, looked upon this new will as so much waste-paper when he carried it to Goldwin's bedside a day or so after the interview; and when, duly signed and attested, he predicted, 'I shall be asking you to sign another will before another month goes over our heads,' he fully believed what he said.

So it may be understood that, knowing what he knew, John Tackerline felt nervous and flurried as he set his gold pince-nez, and coughed and fussed and fidgeted with his handkerchief.

Captain Pennacove—a man of reverence for woman—was not thinking of the will, but of the widow, and the good husband she must be mourning. He, a stranger, had heard naught of her but through her husband, who had filled his letters to him with her praises.

His blue eyes were dimmed, and his ruddy countenance sorrow-stricken, for he bewailed the loss of his friend, and was full of earnest sympathy for the lovely creature left behind so early widowed.

Washington Larry sat in his usual fashion, sideways, on his chair, his arms on the back of it, and his head down on them. He sat in a far-off corner, almost unnoticed, with his heart like lead with the weight of its pain and remorse.

Mrs. Goldwin took her seat by an open window which overlooked the harbour; she turned her eyes to the great cliffs beyond, but with no sense alive that minute but hearing. The window might just as well have been a blank wall as she stared vacantly at it. Her profile alone could be seen by the two men present, in whom she aroused a pitying interest. Her golden crown of hair was capped with heavy crape and widow's weeds, her figure was draped in crape from throat to waist, from

waist to hem, and her face, whiter by contrast with her mourning attire, had no chastened sorrow, but suspense and eager attention, as the lawyer prepared to unroll the parchment sheets, spread them out, coughed again, wiped his lips with his handkerchief, drew his chair well under him, looked towards the window, next at the men, and again at the window, before he proceeded to read aloud the last wishes of his late client, and began :

'This is the last will and testament made by me, Jeremiah Goldwin, of the city of Phillipia, in the colony of Georgius. I hereby revoke all wills made by me at any time heretofore. I appoint John Tackerline, lawyer, practising in the city of Phillipia, and Timothy Pennacove, late commander of the ship *Gitano*, sailing between England and the colonies, my executors, and the guardians of my son, Roland Kovodel Goldwin, unto whom the bulk of all properties left by me, Jeremiah Goldwin, shall revert, together with the land leases of Virginia Bay, and for whom the sum of £2,000 (two thousand pounds) annually shall be held in trust by the said executors, John Tackerline and Timothy Pennacove, for the maintenance, education, and general requirements during his minority of the said Roland Kovodel Goldwin.

'And I herewith direct that the business known as Goldwin and Company shall be henceforth conducted under the management of the said Timothy Pennacove, and that the late manager, Theodore Lockstud, shall have no place or position in the said business whatever.

'Unto Isabella Goldwin I give, devise, and bequeath the property known as Goolgun, with all plate, pictures, and appurtenances thereof, together with an annual income of £1,000 (one thousand pounds), subject to conditions, the said conditions being that, should she take a second husband, the bequest shall be made null and void.'

Here the widow shifted her head, that her face might be hidden, as a wave of rebellious blood made it scarlet, and indignation darted in flashes from her eyes. Her husband had avenged himself, and it was hers now to suffer humiliation and outrage. With an effort she listened to what followed, as John Tackerline continued with a sing-song drawl:

'Unto Timothy Pennacove I give, devise, and bequeath an annuity of £1,000 (one thousand pounds), and unto Washington Larry an annuity of £500 (five hundred pounds), together with the property known as Bachelor's Nest.'

Washington never lifted his head, but there was a quivering of the narrow bowed shoulders, which told he had heard. Captain Pennacove gave a little convulsive start and a stare, but relapsed into a calm and listening attitude; while Mrs. Goldwin, having controlled her features to suit the *rôle* of sad resignation, now turned her back upon the window, and a full face to the lawyer, who felt himself getting red and hot under the strain of his present office of imparting to her the peculiarities of her husband's will. But, like Balaam, he could only speak the words that were put into his mouth, and was compelled to risk the displeasure of a Balak in petticoats.

So he continued giving out a string of bequests to various benevolent societies and charitable institutions with which his late client had identified himself, and unto which his will promised a liberal scattering of his thousands. Then followed the mention of a legacy to each of the servants to the amount of fifty pounds, and next to Mrs. Dripper.

'Unto Mrs. Dripper,' read out the lawyer, 'the foster-mother of Roland Kovodel Goldwin, I hereby bequeath a gift of £100 (one hundred pounds). Unto Cecil Lockstud, the foster-brother of Roland Kovodel Goldwin,

£500 (five hundred pounds), to be placed at interest for him until of age, or, in the event of his death, to revert to the general fund. Futhermore, let it be known——'

Here John Tackerline was obliged to pause, beginning to fidget more than ever and irritate with his nervousness.

'Furthermore, let it be known,' he repeated, 'that, should my son, Roland Kovodel Goldwin, die in his minority, and in the absence of next of kin, the whole estate, together with the property known as Goolgun, with plate, pictures, and appurtenances thereof, and the annuity of £1,000 (one thousand pounds) bequeathed to Isabella Goldwin, shall be given over to the said Timothy Pennacove and the said Washington Larry for one-third of the same to be distributed equally to the aforesaid institutions'—here the respective institutions were named in order—'and two-thirds to be divided equally between the said Timothy Pennacove and the said Washington Larry, after the disposal of the business known as Goldwin and Company, and the realizing of the estate, from which shall be given £100 (one hundred pounds) annually to the said Isabella Goldwin for life.

'In witness whereof I, the said Jeremiah

Goldwin, have to this my last will and testament set my name this —— day of ——,' etc.

Tackerline read it all through from Alpha to Omega with careful enunciation of legal phraseology, and religious dwelling on all its repetitions—which, to a considerable extent, have been spared the reader—doing the work he was called upon to do with an unerring preciseness.

Winding up with the names of witnesses, the day of month and time of year, he ceased, but remained with his head still bent over the will, under pretence of quietly studying it, as he turned the pages, but in reality afraid to meet the eyes of Mrs. Goldwin, fearful of adding to her confusion.

She had risen from her chair, however, as he gave out its concluding clause. She was perfectly colourless, even to her lips; her face was contracted, as if with pain; her eyes shot forth a gleam not unlike a cat's at the approach of a strange cur; and while one hand pressed the chair-back for support, and the other held an inch-wide black-bordered handkerchief, she spoke with a tremble of that wrath which would not be quite subjected to her will, and was the more violent because of forced suppression. Yet was her tone subdued:

'Gentlemen, with your permission I will retire.'

The lawyer immediately raised his head and bowed to her politely; but the Captain was on his feet in a second, and, hurrying over to the lady, offered his arm to escort her to the door.

All his chivalry was to the fore in the cause of afflicted Beauty; all his indignation was aroused by the churlish conditions stamped indelibly on those parchment sheets; and his manner indicated commiseration and profound respect as she accepted his proffered help, and moved away to hurry to the solitude she desired.

The bluff Captain returned to the room, and walked up to the lawyer, who was tying up his papers and preparing to leave.

'Can you explain this, sir?' he demanded, bunching his white brows severely, and pointing to the will, now rolled up.

Tackerline shrugged his shoulders and shot out his lips before he answered:

'Not to my satisfaction any more than yours. It is queer.'

'It is infamous!' roared the Captain.

Both men were oblivious in that moment of Larry, who retained his original position,

whose shoulders had not lost their suspicious trembling.

'It strikes me,' continued Captain Pennacove, 'that the compass was all wrong that landed you into this business. There never lived a more just, generous, whole-souled fellow than old Jerry. There was nothing paltry about him, nor was he capable of doing a petty thing, and this'—he brought down an open hand and struck at the will as it lay on the table—'is a mean thing—a libel on the man's nature—and ought to be disputed. Why hamper his widow with such restrictions, a mere girl who naturally may desire to marry again? It beats me hollow, and I wish he had forgotten me. And if the boy dies, she is to come to Larry and me for a miserable pittance. By ——, I won't do it, that's flat; she shall have my share. I'll will all mine back to her as sure as my name is Timothy Pennacove.'

The lawyer now stood up, and, being relieved of his task as well as the widow's presence, was more at ease, and as calm as the Captain was furious. He put his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, and in answer to this tirade merely ejaculated:

'Most extraordinary!'

'Extraordinary, sir, it's downright madness!'

'Not altogether without method, perhaps,' hinted Tackerline. 'My client, Captain, was a man never to do things by halves; but he made a mistake in marrying one so young. Young people like the society of young people, and they say a great deal of Mrs. Goldwin that may be untrue. Goldwin was desperately in earnest about that will, I know, suffering from a paroxysm of jealousy, no doubt, and was determined to prevent his heir running the risk of would-be step-fathers with spendthrift tendencies, yet I really think but for his unfortunate and comparatively sudden death he would have had it altered.'

'And I say neither of you know what you're talking about—neither of you,' affirmed a sepulchral voice from a corner of the room.

The lawyer and the Captain were thus reminded of Washington Larry's proximity.

Larry lifted himself at last wearily from his chair, and walked over to join the men who had been discussing and disparaging Jerry's disposition towards his wife. His sallow face was lined and seamed with grief that refused to be comforted, with remorse that would not be banished.

His eyes were almost lost in dark-circled sockets, as he faced the self-appointed judges

of his beloved friend. His aspect invited sympathy at once, and as the Captain knew how dear the departed had been to him, pity transiently banished all thought of the injustice of the will, and made him lay a broad hand gently on Larry's shoulder, and say, 'Cheer up, cheer up!' for the sake of expressing condolence, and because he could not find anything else to say just then befitting the occasion.

Larry jerked the kindly hand away with a twist of his body, and was not consoled. He had not come there for pity, but to defend Jerry's memory.

'You know nothing,' he began, 'neither of you. I do know something, and wish I didn't. Don't you be blaming him—don't blame the dead. He wasn't mad—he wasn't jealous; he was floored—he was taken in by as big a witch as was ever burnt alive for doing mischief. We can't set fire to her, so it is only what's right for her to get a prick or two if she don't behave herself in the future. He could have left her without a farthing, because he knew at the last that she married him only for his money; and he, as innocent as a baby, thought it was for the love of him, until somebody that stood by saw her taking all he gave with her left hand, while she gave her right hand to a fellow who wasn't

fit to tie Jerry's shoes. Somebody, I say, knew all about it, and thought it right to let her husband know, and when he knew, it just floored him—that's the hard part, it floored him—and he couldn't lift his head. She's lucky to get what she does from him, and if she marries again, it is certain to be a love-match on both sides; and if the boy dies, why she'll be well off on her hundred a year. Don't you blame Jerry; blame her, blame me—the man that would ha' died for him, and is left behind to feed on his riches, and wish to be dead, too, and out of a misery so hard to bear.' He dropped his chin on his breast, and repeating, 'So hard to bear! so hard to bear!' he quitted the room hurriedly.

So the millionaire's will was read; so the public were satisfied with an outline, and left ignorant of conditions; so the surface from which Jerry had passed relapsed to its original tranquillity until some fresh matter might be ready to shoot into the stream.

The germs of future disturbance, however, for the few who may be called the Atlas of this history, were already in the air.

When Jeremiah Goldwin was dead and buried, Mrs. Lockstud was brought back to the world and all its cares—perfectly helpless, and

still confined to her bed, but strong enough to cry out for her child. Here arose a new difficulty, for it was understood that the little Cecil was pining away.

Mrs. Goldwin had taken it upon herself to call in a specialist—not her own doctor, but one devoted to the physical study of children. Since the reading of the will she spent much of her time in the nursery. It was she who tended the little patient—she who presented him to the doctor for examination; moreover, she was moved to tears, and strangely agitated when the doctor shook his head, and said: 'The boy will die.'

She blamed Mrs. Dripper; firstly, for working upon her sympathy; secondly, for taking upon herself the care of two foster children when it was evident one child was as much as she could honestly attend to.

It was after the doctor's visit that she apprised the Lockstuds of the boy's serious condition.

Mrs. Calliport and Mrs. Glade were also indignant with Mrs. Dripper and the greed which had urged her to undertake a double duty so ill-performed, and all concerned thought that the sick child should be brought home and attended to under stricter supervision without further imposing upon Mrs. Goldwin, whose

conduct towards the tiny sufferer was accounted — by Mrs. Glade and Mrs. Calliport — exemplary enough to partly wipe off old aversion. Priscilla took the puling baby in her arms as she lay on her bed, and, crying over it, felt that it would be wrested from them before it could lift its eyes to hers in sweet recognition.

Lockstud's position at this time was not an enviable one. With an unforeseen force of legal strength, he had been sent adrift—politely dismissed — from a lucrative position, while Mrs. Goldwin, unable to help him, had been trapped like a beautiful bird in a cage, the delicate network of which he and she had certainly fashioned.

Yet for the present she was amply provided for: while he, having revelled in the sun of her husband's wealth, was now exposed to all the rude winds of chilly poverty, and worse than poverty—debt. He was a man inclined to luxurious tastes and costly habits, and scattered his money lavishly from his hand, careless of a threatening shallow purse. Now his hand was empty, and the safe pleasure he had been experiencing for some time of dipping in the Goldwin coffers for his remuneration to swell that purse to comfortable proportions was a thing of the past. His wife, too, remained

sickly, and fretted over the dying child, so that he was wearied with his troubles, and one in particular, which even when others were removed made pure joys an utter impossibility, filled his home with shadows and changed the spring of his life to autumn.

Aunt Jessie drew some comfort from his misfortunes; she recognised a blessing in disguise when he, pushed to extremities, appealed to her for help, and told her how he was situated.

'Understand,' she said, after some discussion, 'why I live and save, and have saved. Give me credit for making your interests mine—for some forethought. If I were as you, with more of the spendthrift and less of the miser in me, I could not aid you to-day. You would have squandered as fast as I gave, and I should now be unable to assist you. Rest your mind, dear; your debts shall be paid, but you must go into a less pretentious house, live quietly, give up old habits, and stay at home with your wife when work outside is done. No doubt the bank will take you back, if I use my influence again as I did before, and I don't know what else you can turn to. Yes, I'll pay your debts to a farthing, and never see you want; but—one rumour of old shortcomings, and I will

have no more to do with you. Be a man worthy of the gentle mother who gave you to me, and all mine shall be yours some day, or it shall go to found or enrich some charity as the surest way to invest it for the general good and ensure against its waste. I will not leave it to be fooled away.'

Thus Aunt Jessie, whose threat, like a whip held menacingly over a wilful boy's head to extort a promise of amendment, made her nephew bend to necessity's rod and assume a virtue which could never honestly be his. This assumption sat ill upon him like a badly-fitting garment, and together with that shadow, indefinable to others, begat gloom, ill-temper, and morosity, sullen brethren indeed and fierce opponents to conjugal felicity, even as the months wore on, and Priscilla was comforted for the loss of her first-born by the birth of a second child.

As for Mrs. Goldwin, she was wise enough to make the best of her trap, and devoted herself assiduously to the care of the embryo millionaire.

Mrs. Calliport was appeased.

END OF VOL. I.